

Statement on the FY-1988 Appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities

Before the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies (Committee on Appropriations), by Helen Hornbeck Tanner, Research Associate, The Newberry Library, and Project Director and Editor: "Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History", on behalf of the National Humanities Alliance

March 10, 1987

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Helen Hornbeck Tanner, an historian at the Newberry Library and project director and editor of the Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History, published earlier this year by the University of Oklahoma Press. Both the project and the resulting publication have been supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Atlas is a new kind of book designed to illuminate an important but obscure area of our national history. This volume is composed of three elements: maps, historical text, and illustrations. The emphasis is on the 33 high quality maps in as many as five colors showing the changing locations of Indian villages; the accompanying text explains the reasons for the changes; and the 80 illustrations from 18th and 19th century sources realistically portray the historic scene.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to describe our project to the Subcommittee because I believe that it provides a clear example of the significance of the Endowment's work in making visible and in underscoring the value of humanities scholarship to a wide range of Americans, both within and beyond the academic and educational communities.

The need for such a resource such as the Atlas became apparent to me more than ten years ago when I was engaged in historical research dealing with Ohio Valley Indian tribes. I found that this particular area on otherwise colored maps was only pale grey with the notation "insufficient data", or "unknown tribes". Further research made it clear that the Indian history of the entire Great Lakes region, and particularly the Ohio Valley, was largely missing from the accounts of American history; and also this history was so complex that it could be properly clarified only with the aid of maps. The complexity was attributable to the fact that from fifteen to thirty different Indian tribes were involved, along with the representatives of the governments of France, England, Spain, and finally the United States.

History in this region was shaped by intertribal and international warfare, refugee movements, epidemics of European-introduced diseases, fur trade rivalry, white population advances, Indian resistance, Indian treaties ceding land to state and national governments, and arrangements for reservations, removal, and individual allotment of land. Maps can graphically display the diversity, and the changes.

The Atlas project is an example of the kind of a task that requires, and seems, to merit, federal government support because it draws together people and organizations from many sectors of the population across a broad geographical area. The final product of this basic research endeavor is a permanent addition to the body of knowledge about American and Indian history, in a form that appears to gratify the needs of many different kinds of people here in the United States and in foreign countries.

Work on this project began in September, 1976 at the Newberry Library in Chicago, a private research library with exceptional resources for studying both Indian history and cartography. While our project was still in the proposal stage, we had helpful suggestions and constructive recommendations from the staff of the Endowment. And it was encouraging to get a psychological boost from visits made by representatives while map-making was in progress.

From the outset, research for the Atlas involved scholars throughout the country, and Indian people interested in a more realistic presentation of their role in the total history of the Great Lakes - Ohio Valley region. We conferred with Indian leaders in the Chicago area to find out what they thought was important to present on the maps. We also sent news releases to Indian newspapers as well as to professional journals, and local historical societies. County histories were an important source of information on Indian whereabouts during the period from 1830 to 1880.

As a consequence, a number of Indian visitors came to Chicago; others telephoned or wrote to supply details about the former location of village sites. Our correspondence files include letters signed by many well-known scholars, but also letters signed with names like Big Thunder, Red Owl, and Hawk-at Setting-Sun. Through such channels, there have been a number of curious developments leading to the recovery of information not available in archives or printed records. One of the most interesting has been the contact established with descendants of Shawnee families who went to Canada to fight with Tecumseh and the British during the War of 1812. These families returned quietly to Indiana about 1826. Their present day leader began a long correspondence during which he shared township maps showing where these Shawnee had purchased land near Indianapolis. He also sent along copies of the minutes of Shawnee council meetings that continued up to 1880. This group is presently based near Dayton, Ohio.

Another Indian leader who talked with us said that he had read about the Atlas project in an Indian newspaper published in San Francisco, where he was discharged from army service. He reported that he decided he was going to find out what was going on, and eventually gathered a delegation from Manitoulin Island in Lake Huron to come for a conference.

Much of the geographically specific information for making the Atlas maps was gleaned from the reports supplied as evidence in litigation presented before the Indian Claims Commission. Additional data came from archives and state historical collections in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The project also had the benefit of contemporary graduate research. A Doctoral dissertation at the University of Maine cleared up some confusion about 17th century Indian towns on the north shore of Lake Ontario. Another thesis put together details about Delaware Indian villages along the White River in Indiana in the late 18th century. A history graduate student at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas, supplied reports indicating that Osage Indians from Missouri had fought on the Pennsylvania front during the French and Indian wars of the 1750s. These are examples of the range of assistance given by younger scholars.

The president of the Lapeer (Michigan) county historical society sent a map of the Indian villages in his county, while a local museum director in Alpena, Michigan, provided the information on Indian occupation of his district. When the documentary evidence was conflicting about an island in Lake Erie, we called the local librarian in Huron, Ohio, and were able to settle the correct names.

To collect and organize the data for the Atlas maps, the original team of three divided the total area into separate districts. After a year, it became apparent that a Canadian specialist would be required to concentrate on the part of the Great Lakes Region north of the Lakes. With this

addition, the staff also began utilizing current research of the Department of Indian Affairs in Canada.

By the time that research for the Atlas was well under way, Indians and non-Indians were able to take advantage of the systematically collected information. A Vermont poet was able to locate Indian towns in southern Indiana that he had heard about from his Shawnee grandfather. A social scientist from Australia studied the mapping techniques, in order to do similar mapping of changing locations of aborigines in Australia as a consequence of pressure from European immigration and expanding mining and agricultural activities. Drafts of maps were xeroxed, and provided for interested colleagues. The Great Lakes Commission, composed of Canadian and American policy-makers, used the Atlas map of subsistence patterns as an important reference. These are a few examples of the services performed by the staff during the active research period of Atlas preparation. We became well aware that doctoral dissertations were awaiting completion, and books awaiting concentrated effort until the authors had access to the geographic information promised by the list of maps to be included in the publication.

The publication of the 220 page Atlas in January 1987, created an even more enthusiastic response than had been anticipated. The Chicago Tribune made the Atlas a major feature, with color illustrations, a map and several columns of description on the front of the feature section, and an additional half page of copy on an inside page. A photo-reporter flew from Detroit to get material for a similarly extensive feature for the Detroit News.

The public event held at The Newberry Library to celebrate the appearance of the Atlas drew a large audience including members of the local Indian community, Indian people from reservations in northern Wisconsin, and staff and friends from the Canadian Consulate. A noted historian of the Canadian frontier was a featured speaker, along with a recent president of the American Anthropological Association. The book was "out of stock" by mid-February, but more copies are expected to be available by the end of March, and a paperback is promised for July. The Library bookstore reported that one man purchased five copies saying that the first copy was to go to the library of the school his children attended. A professor of anthropology at the University of Michigan said that six graduate students saw the copy on his desk, and immediately put in orders for copies of their own. An Indian leader from a Sioux reservation in South Dakota telephoned to say that he heard the good news that the Atlas was completed, and would get one as soon as possible. Another friend called from a Canadian reservation on Walpole Island, located on the delta of the St. Clair River, near Detroit, to say that he knew the book was expensive, but his daughters would put the money together to get a copy of the first edition. He wanted to be sure that his island was noted as unceded Indian territory in Canada.

Press coverage giving credit to the National Endowment for the Humanities and Newberry Library, has continued. Local public radio spotlighted the Atlas on their weekend broadcast, and the Chicago correspondent for the Voice of America radio did a taped interview, declaring when he left that the book should be one of their reference books, and probably should be in the overseas libraries supplied by the United States Information Agency. A district judge in Michigan, who classified himself as among the "just curious," wrote that the book opened "new vistas of understanding" about the history of the "Old Northwest." A colonial historian at the University of Illinois, upon reading the atlas, promptly decided to add the maps to the exhibit for which he was chief consultant, being prepared for the Chicago Historical Society. Other scholars are considering research to create similar atlas volumes that can fit around the fringes of the Great Lakes Atlas, to give coverage to the northeast and mid-Atlantic states, the South and Great Plains.

This account of recent experience provides a brief case history of the broad range of positive results --extending far beyond the scholarly community -- that can be achieved by federal support for basic research in the field of humanities.