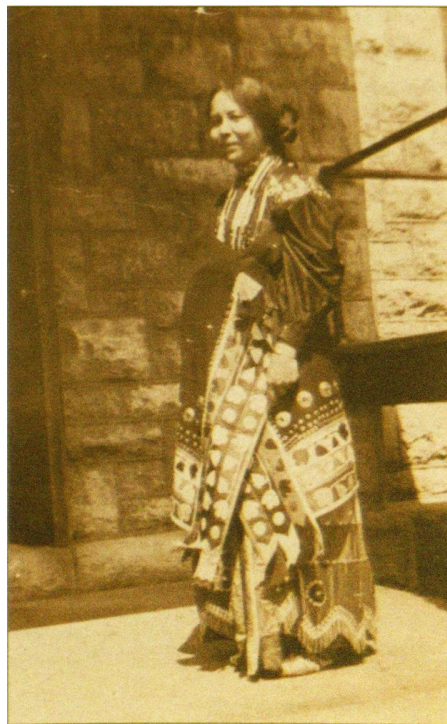


Prairie Band Potawatomi Reservation: Mayetta,
Jackson County, Kansas from 1846 to Present Day

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This study of persistence factors on an Indian reservation in Northeast Kansas includes interviews from Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribal Council member Carrie L. O'Toole (Wabaunsee), Prairie Band tribal member Laveda L.T. Wahweotten, and Dr. Eric Anderson of Haskell Indian Nations University. The study also includes recent maps of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Reservation, along with a photograph of the Prairie Band Potawatomi written language and an extension into the historical background of the Potawatomi Indian Tribes.

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When observing the historical background and establishment of Kansas, most aspire to study the history of Euro-American settlement that formed in eastern Kansas from the 1840's-1860's and spread into Western Kansas around the 1860's-1890's. (1) With migration westward advancing at a phenomenal rate, Euro-American conquest of the foreign terrain beginning with the carrying trade, era before railroads, became the primary focus of Kansas settlement history. The massive migration into the Great Plains was of historical significance, not only for the Euro-American families traveling into the area, but also for the numerous Native American tribes that were directly affected by the movement. The creation of Kansas was greatly influenced by the shared cultural identities that accumulated during the formation of numerous other eastern states, but the direct patronage to the formation of America came at the great cost of the Native American tribes who already laid claim to their homeland. The native tribes of America shared ancestral cultures, though not always completely the same, which signified their respect for the land and well-being of the natural world. Due to the consistent flow of newcomers into the natives' homeland, many tribes lost their land and cultures through the forced assimilation to the Euro-American beliefs. (2) With the attention focusing on the rise of migration from foreigners, many Native American tribes were overlooked and their status as an autonomous government in America became almost non-existence. (3) Without the jurisdiction of a "citizen" in America, the Indian people cascaded into an era of oppression, discrimination, brutality, and near extinction of ancestral heritage. Such is true with the Potawatomi tribes of the Great Lakes in Michigan. (4)

While the members of the Potawatomi tribe fared better than some others, the

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forced migration from their homeland to Indiana, Wisconsin, Kansas, Illinois, Oklahoma, and Canada were still put into action. (5) Even in the face of constant pressure from the American government, the Potawatomi Indians stayed strong to their beliefs and remained persistent in their fight for land. One of the most significant persistence factors among the Potawatomi Indians is well represented by the Prairie Band Potawatomi tribe of Kansas. Though they were not the original Native Americans in Kansas, their fight against the government's attempts to extract them from their reservation is one of strength, intelligence, and persistence. (6) In the study of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Native Americans we will examine their ancestral history, migration into eastern Kansas around 1846 (Jackson County), settlement factors on the Prairie Band Potawatomi reservation, and persistence factors including shared culture, beliefs, language, and economic advancement.

Potawatomi History

The history pertaining to the Potawatomi Indians is both compelling and admirable, yet it encompasses an air of sadness to the fate which befell them. The Potawatomi name is referred to as "People of the Fire" or "Keeper of the Fire", and the 17th century showed great prosperity for the Potawatomi nation who had around 8,000 members in southwest Michigan. (7) Their original language is closely related to Eastern Algonquians who were believed to have migrated to the Great Lakes area, and it is likely that they assimilated with the Potawatomi tribe. (8)

The beliefs of early Potawatomi Indians were of a cosmological nature where

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connection with the earth led to the protection and guidance from guardian spirits. (9)

Some of these beliefs are still practiced today among the Prairie Band Potawatomi Indians; however, it is incorporated into their present day religion of Catholicism and often overshadowed. (10)

The new encroachment that spread across the land like wild fire eventually led to the destruction of the Potawatomi freedom and a new chapter called “reservations” began. According to *“Indians of North America: The Potawatomi”*,

Between 1789 and 1867 the Potawatomi negotiated nearly 60 treaties to sell off their land, parcel by parcel. This was almost twice as many treaties as any other single tribe. As the Potawatomi sold off choice areas by treaty, they sometimes were given reservations to live on.” “Poverty was indeed a factor in the Potawatomi’s willingness to sell land. They had become dependent on manufactured goods, and as the fur trade declined in importance they no longer received enough income from that source to buy what they needed.(11)

Due to the extreme poverty that grasped the Potawatomi Nation, many tribes were forced to sell their land as a source of income. Living among the Euro-American settlers brought new expectations of social and political organization and the Indian tribes were expected to be active participants. Many of the settlers exploited the Native Americans’ lack of understanding pertaining to Euro-American social and political affairs, and through the exploitation of the tribes, the beginning of Indian removal, oppression, and inequality began. (12) The role that reservations play for Native American tribes can often be viewed as the “Beginning of the End”; however, without the existence of reservations almost all Native American heritage, culture, and history would be lost. Even though reservations are of “less than ideal” standards, they still provide a fighting chance for cultural survival.

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Potawatomi Migration and Settlement Factors: Mayetta, Jackson County,

Kansas

The Potawatomi Indians underwent multiple migration movements throughout the years that led to a major separation among the tribes. The passing of the Indian Removal Act (1830) moved Potawatomi tribes west of the Mississippi; however, some tribes remained in the northern states. (13) Due to the forced migration the Potawatomi tribes split, but there still remain seven tribes in the United States and two in Canada. (14) The tribes in the U.S. consist of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation (Oklahoma), Forest County Potawatomi Community (Wisconsin), Hannahville Indian Community (Michigan), Huron Potawatomi, Inc.(Michigan), Match-e-be-nash-she-wish Band of Potawatomi (Michigan), Pokagon Band (Michigan and Indiana), and Prairie Band of Potawatomi (Kansas).(15) While the other tribes remained in the northern states, in 1846 two of the Potawatomi tribes, Prairie Band of Potawatomi and Citizen Potawatomi Nation, moved onto a reservation in Eastern Kansas, Jackson County, located near Topeka, Kansas.(16) The Prairie Band and Citizen tribes were once conjoined until 1867 when the Citizen Potawatomi Nation broke away and moved to Oklahoma. (17)

The settlement in Kansas was not an easy one for the Prairie Band Potawatomi Indians as it might have been thought. The pieces of land that the tribe received on the reservation was not of their native background. (18) In the northern states the tribe's lifestyles more closely resembled that of hunters and gathers, even though farming had been incorporated; with Kansas terrain consisting of mainly 'prairie' land, the initial assimilation to the land took longer than the average Euro-American faced. (19)

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European settlers had developed many agricultural skills throughout their years in America, and while the migration to Kansas required an adaptation period, the settlement factors were less in comparison to the Prairie Band Native Americans. (20) The Indians living on the reservation not only experienced an agricultural block, but they also faced massive economic deprivations and social discrimination. Eventually the tribe adapted fully to the agricultural way of life, and through assimilation of religion began developing an identity with the community; however, on an economic level the tribe has continued to fight for recognition as rightful owners to their land. (21)

For years the members of the Prairie Band Nation fought for the survival of their culture, heritage, and equality. Nothing could be more devastating to the Native American community than the loss of more land, yet that's exactly what occurred in the 1860's with the expansion of the railroad system. The Prairie Band Potawatomi Reservation used to cover a 30 by 30 mile radius, stretching out as far as St. Mary's in Potawatomi County.

Today the land consists of an 11 by 11 mile radius located in Jackson County, in proximity to Mayetta, and includes specific landmarks such as Little Solider Creek, Solider Creek, James Creek, Crow Creek, Dutch Creek, and Rocky Ford Bedrock. (22).

(Figure 1. Recent map of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Reservation)

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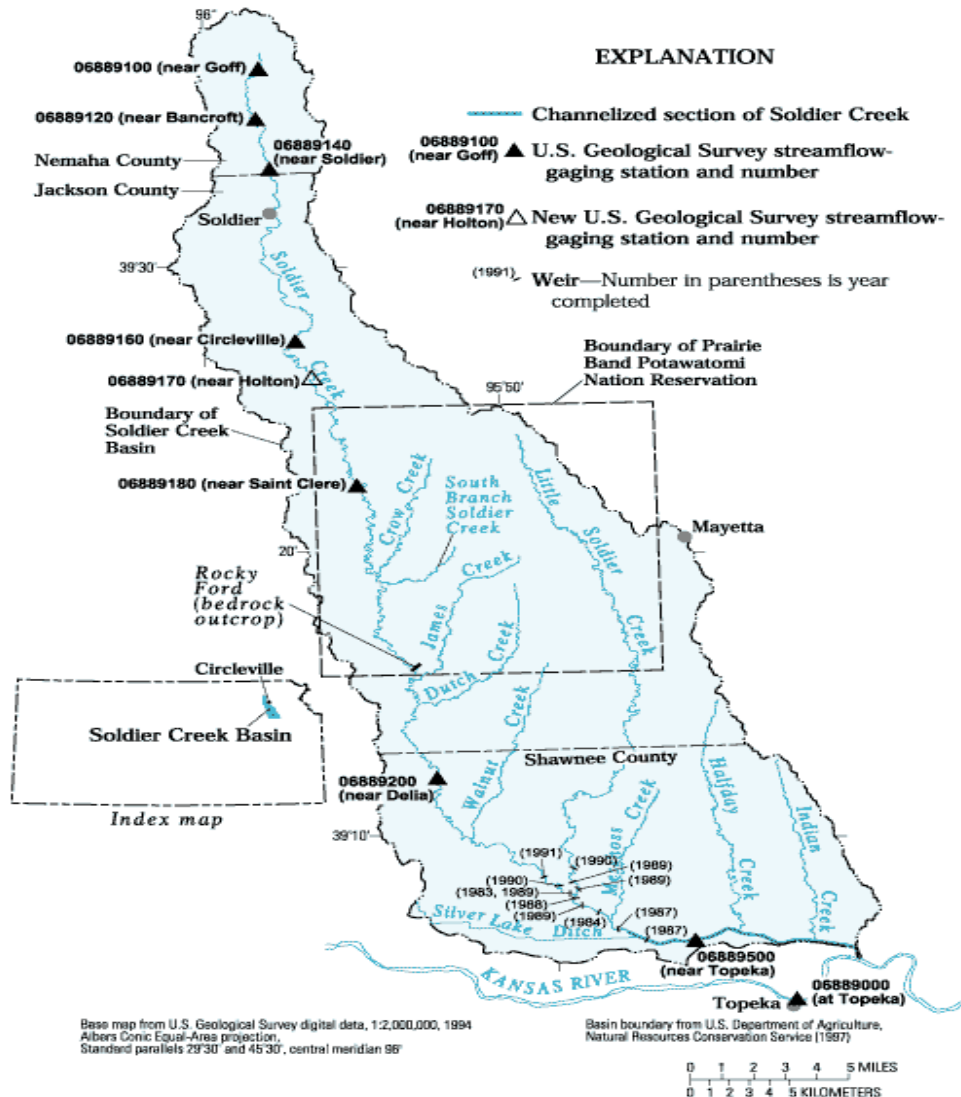


Figure 1. Location of Soldier Creek Basin, Soldier Creek, major tributaries, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Reservation, channelized section, weirs, and U.S. Geological Survey streamflow-gaging stations, northeast Kansas.

Figure 1. Computer Photograph of current Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Reservation. 1994. SOURCE: USGS Kansas Water Science Center: Historical Channel Change Along Solider Creek, Northeast Kansas; Kyle E. Juracek. The Prairie Band Potawatomi Reservation covers land that consists of hard agricultural terrain, making their transition on the Reservation more difficult.

The birth of the railroad system into Kansas brought about numerous troubles for the Prairie Band Indians. According to the “*Historical Atlas of Kansas*”, the section titled “Railroad Land Grants in Kansas”, the entry broadly depicts the massive domination of the railroads.

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The Federal Government granted more than four million Kansas acres directly to two railroad systems-The Kansas Pacific, with a grant of 3,925,791 acres, and the Union Pacific, Central Branch, with a grant of 223,141 acres. In addition there were large grants, also in excess of four million acres, made to the state for transfer to railroads. The largest grantee was the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, recipient of 2,944,788 acres. The half-million-acre internal improvement grant supplied to Kansas on gaining statehood was turned over to the railroads. Also, railroad companies were able to purchase surplus Indian lands at a reduced cost in order to further acquire assets for railroad construction.(23)

Railroad companies acquiring Indian reservation land was only the beginning of the commitment of treaty-violating acts. In an interview with Dr. Eric Anderson, professor at Haskell Indian Nations University, he addressed some persisting issues about types of land legislation Native Americans have been subjected to; these include Trust land, Title Land, Fee Simple Land, and Allotment Land. (24) The Dawes Act of 1887, or General Allotment Act, focused on breaking up the reservation by assigning specific “lots” of land to Native Americans. In an article pertaining to the Dawes Act, historians address the mindset behind the newly implemented policy.

Very sincere individuals reasoned that if a person adopted white clothing and ways, and was responsible for his own farm, he would gradually drop his Indian-ness and be assimilated into the population.(25)

It is then discussed in a later passage of the true purpose behind the passing of the Dawes Act and why it has become so passionately despised by many of the Native American tribes.

The purpose of the Dawes Act and the subsequent acts that extended its initial provisions was purportedly to protect Indian property rights, particularly during the land rushes of the 1890s, but in many instances the results were vastly different. The land allotted to the Indians included desert or near-desert lands unsuitable for farming. In addition, the techniques of self-sufficient farming were much different from their tribal way of life. Many Indians did not want to take up

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agriculture, and those who did want to farm could not afford the tools, animals, seed, and other supplies necessary to get started. There were also problems with inheritance. Often young children inherited allotments that they could not farm because they had been sent away to boarding schools. Multiple heirs also caused a problem; when several people inherited an allotment, the size of the holdings became too small for efficient farming.(26)

A recent map of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Reservation Allotment accurately portrays the Dawes Act having been subsequently put into effect. (Figure 2. Prairie Band Potawatomi plots of land.)

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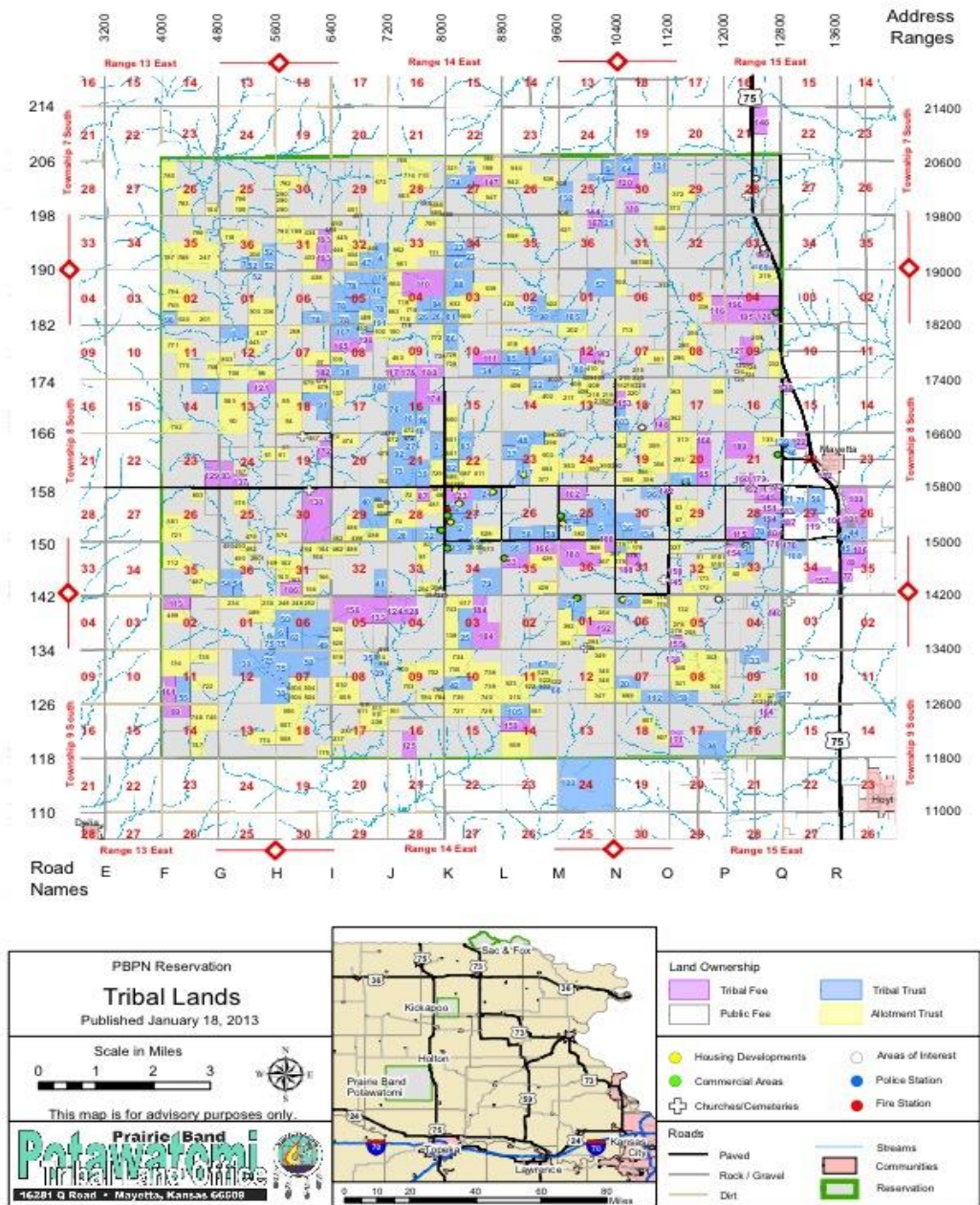


Figure 2. Computer generation of a Current map of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Reservation, 2013. SOURCE: Carrie L. O’Toole personal collection. The borders have dramatically shrunk in comparison to the first reservation that extended to a 30 by 30 mile radius and the checker board plots implemented by the Allotment act are clearly evident.

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Prairie Band Potawatomi Persistence Factors

The Potawatomi heritage and culture is that of strong traditional beliefs and values. Even through the continually changing geographic homeland and persistent influence by the American government to create assimilation, the traditional culture found a way to remain relevant at such a vital time in history. Many factors contributed to the survival of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. One of the most significant factors was their use of the legal system to fight the government. (27) In an interview with Carrie L. O'Toole (Wabaunsee), member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribe and respected council member, she addresses the legal and economic factors that allowed for the advancement of the tribe. Mrs. O'Toole states that in 1934 with the Indian Recognition Act, members of the tribe traveled to Washington D.C. to fight for their reservations. (28) This was one of many legal strategies used by the tribe to claim their reservation land. A major persistence factor in the fight for economic survival by the tribe occurred in the 1980s. According to Carrie L. O'Toole, the tribe's first gaming experience began as Bingo Class Two Public Gaming in the 1980s; this later led to Class Three gaming in 1997 after the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was passed in 1988. (29) The Prairie Band Native Americans soon held an institution known today as Prairie Band Casino and Resort; the casino allowed for the economic advancement of the tribe, and they eventually became "One Nation within a Nation"; this allotted for a government-to-government relationship between the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation and the Federal Government of the United States. With such promising economic growth, the tribe was finally able to begin purchasing back

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reservation trust land that was taken from them many years before, and they now had the means to continue pursuing their cultural background and heritage. (30)

Economic and cultural factors became key for the survival of the Potawatomi heritage. Many government programs worked on the assimilation of the Native Americans, and the people of Prairie Band were not exempt. In an interview with Laveda L. T. Wahweotten, Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribal member and respected elder, she reveals her experiences at Indian boarding schools. Her first experience with a boarding school was in 1944 when she was six years old. Laveda and her two brothers were shipped to Carlisle Indian Boarding school in Pennsylvania, and her remembrance of the institution was not of a pleasant nature. The boarding school provided extreme military rule and forced Native Americans to assimilate to Euro-American lifestyles. The practicing of one's cultural background including language, traditions, and spiritual beliefs was completely outlawed and failure to adhere to these rules led to extreme punishment. Due to the severe punishment and oppression, cultural identity and heritage of Native American individuals held within these boarding schools became almost extinct. This institutional structure persisted in all the Indian boarding schools, and though Laveda and her brothers only remained at Carlisle for a brief six months, at age 12 Laveda was sent to the Pawnee Boarding school in Oklahoma where she remained until enrollment of a public high school in the 9th grade. (31)

The shared historical experiences among the Prairie Band Potawatomi Indians have impacted the members in enormous ways. Both positive and negative experiences led to the persistence of the Prairie Band tribe.

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Both Carrie L. O'Toole and Laveda L.T. Wahweotten made statements about the constant oppression of Indian culture within boarding schools and the Euro-American assimilation. Practicing of Native American culture, beliefs, and language was repeatedly removed and stigmatized in "white" communities, and breaking of these rules often led to punishment. (32) Many practiced traditions and beliefs were lost over time; however, with the combined persistence from a handful of older and younger generations, the reappearance of the Prairie Band Potawatomi heritage has made significant strides back into the culture of the Native Americans. In recent years the tribe published written vocabulary of their Native language to insure the survival of their culture; this helped in allowing them the social recognition of being called a true Nation. (33). (Figure 3. Prairie Band Potawatomi written language.)

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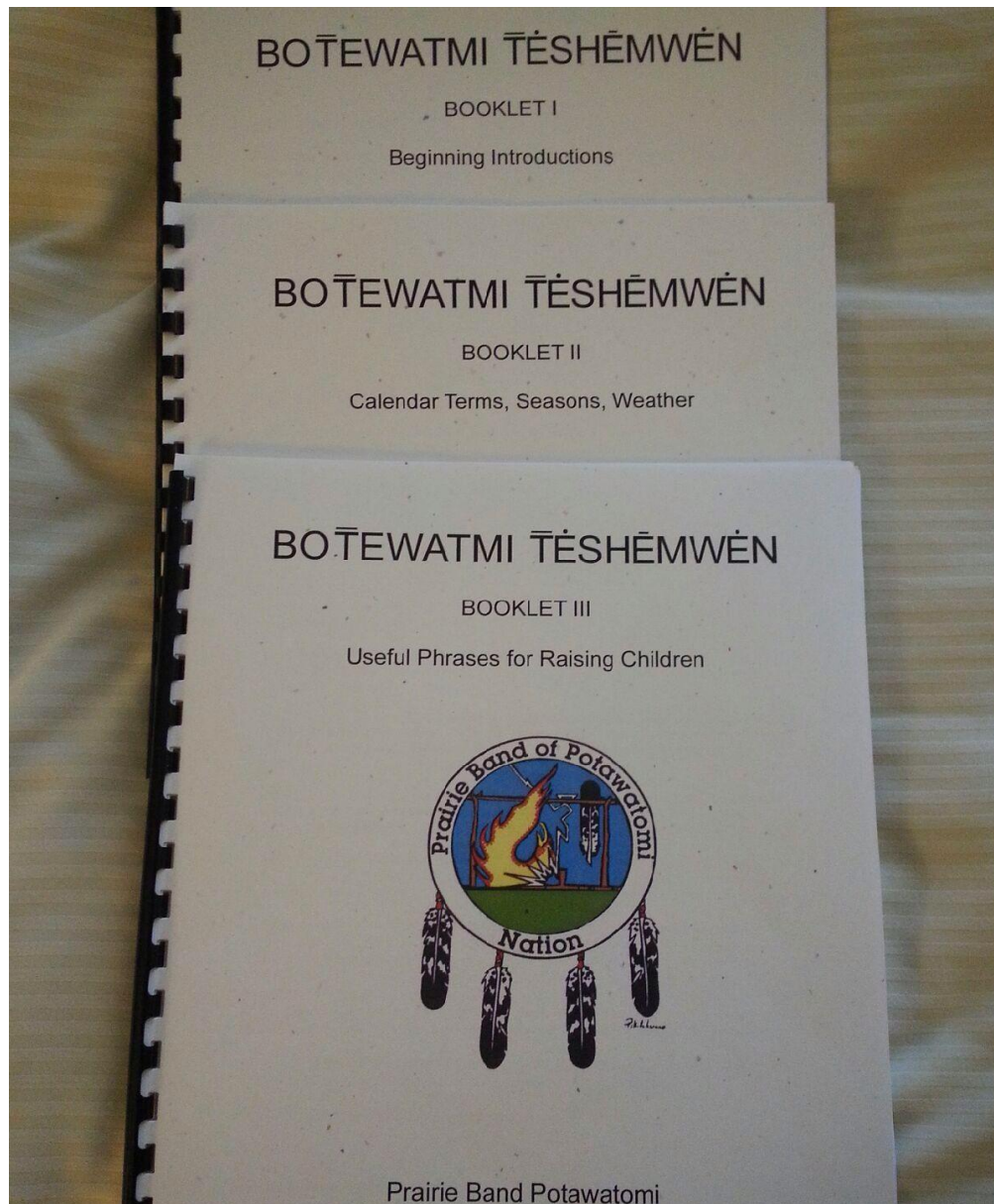


Figure 3. Photograph of the recent Prairie Band Potawatomi written language. C 2000. SOURCE: Carrie L. O'Toole personal collection. The formation of the written language of the Prairie Band Potawatomi has had significant impacts on their identification as a tribe and nation. Through the written vocabulary, the Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribe has begun reconstruction of their heritage.

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One of the main persistence factors among the Prairie Band Potawatomi nation is the sense of family within the entire community. The connection that the tribe shares with all its members is one of a family to family bond, rather than a “government” overseeing its people. Passing down the language and traditions such as food, crafts, and spiritual ceremonies serve to strengthen the tribal community to the core. Such strength is made clear through the shared memories such as the one by Marty Kreipe de Montano, Prairie Band Potawatomi tribal member. In “Foods of the Americans: Native Recipes and Traditions”, Montano recalls the setting on the Potawatomi Reservation with her family during a wake. The survival of the Potawatomi language is prominent as she listens to older family members speaking the language among one another. Foods such as dom na bo (corn soup), coffee, and fried bread are being served, and mourning songs are sung in Potawatomi to prepare the living to let the departed go.⁽³⁴⁾ The traditions are evident through the reminiscence of Montano past and the cultural sense of family is made clear. Though constantly plagued with Euro-American influence, the Prairie Band Potawatomi people found ways to practice their heritage through many aspects such as family functions, ceremonies, and even clothing. (Figure 4. Prairie Band Potawatomi woman in ceremonial clothing.)

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Figure 4. Prairie Band Potawatomi woman in ceremonial clothing on the Potawatomi Reservation. SOURCE: *Foods of the Americas: native recipes and traditions*. Fernando and Marlene Divina, with essays by George P. Horse [et. al.]

Every year the seven Potawatomi bands from the United States, and the two from Canada, come together as a whole to re-establish the Potawatomi Native American culture. (35) The gathering focuses on language conferences, youth conferences, traditional stories, a feast, craft classes, and a ceremonial Pow Wow among all the tribes. (36) Through cultural gatherings such as this one, the Prairie Band Native Americans have been able to successfully reclaim cultural background and traditions upon their reservations. Though conditions still lack as “ideal”, the tribal persistence through shared culture, beliefs, and economic advancement has been key to the survival of the Prairie

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Band Potawatomi heritage. In the interview with Dr. Eric Anderson, he retells the admirable economic accomplishment of the Prairie Band tribe with the story that, “Forty years ago tribal members were operating out of a trailer with \$200, and in only a mere 40 years they have developed into a half a billion dollar industry.”(37) This reveals the true perseverance, intellect, and strength of the Prairie Band Potawatomi people who refused to accept defeat, and persisted to create “One Nation within a Nation”.

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End Notes

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10. Laveda L.T. Wahweotten, Personal Interview. Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribal Member. Hoyt, Kansas, December 7th, 2013.
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17. Carrie L. O'Toole (Wabaunsee), Personal Interview. Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribal Council Member. Potawatomi Reservation, Jackson County, Kansas, December 15th, 2013.
18. Carrie L. O'Toole, Personal Interview. Potawatomi Reservation, Jackson County, Kansas, December 15th, 2013.
19. James A. Clifton, *"The Prairie People"*, pp. 26-28
20. Dr. M.J. Morgan. *"1850's-1870's: Carrying Trade Era"*. Lecture, History 533: Lost Kansas Communities, Kansas State University, October 15th, 2013.
21. Carrie L. O'Toole, Personal Interview. Potawatomi Reservation, Jackson County, Kansas, December 15th, 2013.
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29. Carrie L. O'Toole, Personal Interview. Potawatomi Reservation, Jackson County, Kansas, December 15th, 2013.
30. Carrie L. O'Toole, Personal Interview. Potawatomi Reservation, Jackson County, Kansas, December 15th, 2013.
31. Laveda L.T. Wahweotten, Personal Interview. Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribal Member. Hoyt, Kansas, December 7th, 2013.
32. Carrie L. O'Toole, Personal Interview. Potawatomi Reservation, Jackson County, Kansas, December 15th, 2013. And Laveda L.T. Wahweotten, Personal Interview. Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribal Member. Hoyt, Kansas, December 7th, 2013.
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