

SANKOFA

@Home

*Traverse des
Sioux*



Transform Minnesota

TRAVERSE DES SIOUX

This month, Sankofa at Home returns to southern Minnesota for a stop at Traverse des Sioux.

Traverse des Sioux is the location for the signing of the **Treaty of Traverse des Sioux** on July 23, 1851. Through this treaty and the subsequent **Treaty of Mendota**, four Dakota bands living in Minnesota ceded 24 million acres of land to the U.S. Government.

Through the mid-19th century, the term Traverse des Sioux referred to a crossing point on the **Minnesota River** and to travelling across the prairie west of the river. The site eventually became a town, housing Dakota, fur traders, and white missionaries. The town faded after the treaty signing with the departure of the Dakota and the selection of St. Peter as the county seat. Nothing was left of the town by the late 1860s.

Today, Traverse des Sioux includes the **Treaty Site History Center** with exhibits about the Dakota and the treaty. A trail system with informational markers, a marker for the location of treaty signing, and exhibits about the history of Nicollet County can also be found at the site.



Treaty Site History Center

1851 N Minnesota Ave

St. Peter, MN 56082

mnhs.org/traversedessioux | nchsmn.org

TREATIES OF 1851

The United States signed approximately 375 official treaties with indigenous nations between 1778 and 1871, including roughly a dozen with tribes in present-day Minnesota. Many of these, including the treaties with the Dakota in 1851, included the secession of land from native tribes to the U.S.

Territorial Governor **Alexander Ramsey** and Commissioner of Indian Affairs **Luke Lea**, in particular, pushed for a treaty in an attempt to increase settlement in new territory. Despite claiming there was an “overwhelming tide of migration,” only 6,100 white settlers were listed in Minnesota on the 1850 census. In reality, speculators and fur traders stood to make a substantial amount of money from a treaty.

Through the treaties, the U.S. agreed to pay more than \$3 million to the Dakota. Most of the money was held in a trust with annual 5% interest payments made to the bands. The tribe would maintain a strip of land approximately 20 miles wide by 150 miles long along the Minnesota River, “...only until it was needed for white settlement.”

Ultimately, the decision by Dakota leaders to sign the treaties stemmed from lack of resources and fears that the U.S. would eventually seize the land without any sort of payment.

The **Sisseton** and **Wahpeton** bands of Dakota signed the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux on July 23. Less than two weeks later, the **Mdwakanton** and **Wahpekute** bands signed the similar Treaty of Mendota on August 5 at **Pilot Knob** (across the Minnesota River from **Fort Snelling**).



Inside the Treaty Site History Center

BROKEN PROMISES

When I saw that paper it made me ashamed. We had, we supposed, made a complete treaty, and we were promised a great many things, horses, cattle, flour, plows, and farming utensils, but now it appears that the wind blows it all off.

-*Tayoyateduta (Little Crow), 1854*



This stone, across the highway from the treaty center, marks the site where the treaty was signed

In addition to the treaty, the fur traders introduced a traders' paper. Despite being outlawed, the paper allowed payments from the U.S. government to go directly to traders to pay off the Dakota's "debts" rather than first going to the bands. Dakota leaders signed the paper believing it was an additional copy of the treaty.

As the Dakota settled onto the smaller parcel of land, payments began to come later, making it harder to procure resources. A trip to Washington in 1858 to make a directly plea for help and call to honor the treaty terms led to a treaty ceding the remaining Dakota land north of the Minnesota River.

Ultimately, late annuity payments, a brutal winter, and ongoing issues with traders were contributing factors to the start of the **U.S. - Dakota War of 1862**. Many of the Dakota were removed from Minnesota following the conflict, and the U.S. Government declared the treaties null and void. The Dakota only received a fraction of the money they'd been promised.



RETURNING LAND

Land once belonging to native tribes around the country is slowly being returned, including here in Minnesota.

On March 15, 2024, the state of Minnesota officially returned the 1,200-acre **Upper Sioux Agency State Park** to the **Upper Sioux Community**. Initially established “to serve as the government’s headquarters for distributing annuity payments to the Sisseton and Wahpeton” after the 1851 treaties, the **Upper Sioux Agency** also served as a site of broken promises, starvation, and conflict.

Many native tribes and nations continue to seek the return of land ceded or seized amid broken treaties, viewing the land and the ability to reacquire and make whole what the tribes and nations had been promised as directly tied to their identity and culture.

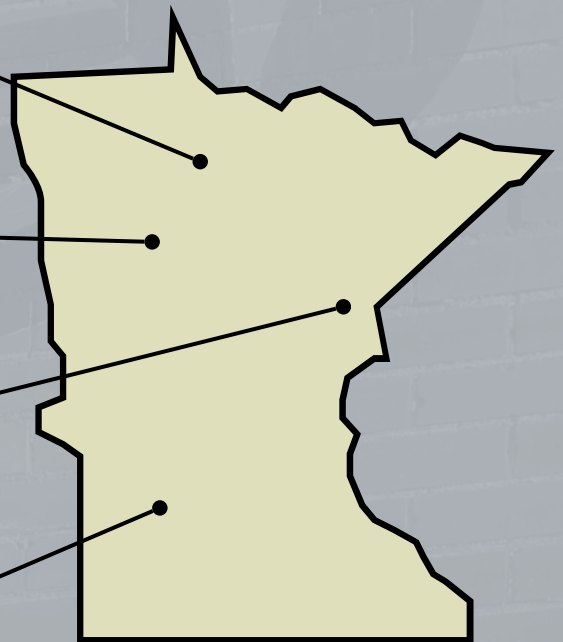
LAND RETURN PROPOSALS IN MN

The **Red Lake Nation** is seeking the return of the entirety of **Upper Red Lake** with a **1-mile barrier of land** around the lake.

A bill proposed in the Minnesota state legislature in 2024 would return portions of the **160,000 acre White Earth State Forest** to the **White Earth Band of Ojibwe** by 2029.

The **University of Minnesota** has been exploring ways to return the **3,400 acres** of their **Forestry Center in Cloquet** to the **Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**.

The state of Minnesota returned **Upper Sioux Agency State Park** to the **Upper Sioux Community** on **March 15, 2024**.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier in 1851: The Diary and Sketches of Frank

Blackwell Mayer

Frank B. Mayer; ed, Bertha L.
Heilbron

“Mayer's diary is a travel narrative, an eyewitness account of a critical treaty signing, and a candid personal view of the development of the artist in mid-nineteenth century America. His words and drawings offer a lively and important resource for historians of art and the frontier, as well as readers of regional history.”

The Relentless Business of Treaties: How Indigenous Land Became U.S. Property.

Martin Case

“How making treaties for land cessions with Native American nations transformed human relationships to the land and became a profitable family business.”

Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery.

Mark Charles and Soong-Chan
Rah

“Injustice has plagued American society for centuries. And we cannot move toward being a more just nation without understanding the root causes that have shaped our culture and institutions. In this prophetic blend of history, theology, and cultural commentary, Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah reveal the far-reaching, damaging effects of the ‘Doctrine of Discovery.’”

Broken Promises

Minnesota Historical Society

“Explore the decisions and outcomes that Dakota people faced when the U.S. government desired to buy and open the land to newcomers in the 19th century. This interactive will take about 10 minutes to complete.”

U.S.-Dakota War - Treaties

Minnesota Historical Society

Why Do Treaties Matter?

Native Governance Center

Why Treaties Matter

NPR

The Great Treaty

TPT

Learn - TDS

Minnesota Historical Society

The U.S.-Dakota Conflict:

The Past is Alive Within Us |

Documentary

TPT

*content specific to the 1851 treaty
beings at 18:36*

Returning land to Native

Americans

MPR News

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

As you visit Traverse des Sioux:

At the Treaty Site History Center

- What do you feel?
- What's new to you?
- How did these treaties shape present-day Minnesota?
- How do we think about treaties like this today?

Explore the trail system

- What do you feel?
- What's new to you?
- Imagine what this area would have been like as the town of Traverse des Sioux:
 - How does place define who we are?
How does that change over time?

At the Treaty Marker

- What do you feel?
- What's new to you?
- Imagine signing the treaty and traders' paper without being able to read them:
 - Who held the power during this process?
 - How might the Dakota have felt as they were signing?
- How do we think about living on land that was acquired through these means?



Transform Minnesota

COMPLEX ISSUES. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE.

This resource list is part of Transform
Minnesota's Sankofa @ Home series

Inclusion of a resource on the list does
not represent a full endorsement of
stated beliefs