

A TRIBUTE TO SURVIVAL

The Milwaukee Public Museum's exhibit *A Tribute to Survival*, now celebrating its twenty-fifth year, stands as a testament to the resilience of the Native American tribes who have survived and endured attempts to assimilate or eradicate them. In fact, our local Native American community dedicated hundreds of hours to the design and content of this dynamic exhibit, ensuring it properly represents the inherent richness, complexity, and endurance of Native American cultures prior to and throughout European contact. Also, *A Tribute to Survival* embodies a culture of connection and equality, peace, and renewal, offering a place to preserve a rich cultural heritage. When MPM first opened the exhibit to the public in 1993, it generated an enduring legacy that now has become an essential part of our identity as an institution. Our hope is that visitors might glimpse the uncommon strength and resolve in the lives depicted here and listen to the stories they pass on to each generation.

The Grand Entry Powwow - This introductory exhibit to the Second Floor North American galleries features a modern powwow grand entry scene with 37 life-sized figures dressed in colorful dance attire. The figures are life casts of Wisconsin Native American people representing the state's tribes.

The First Americans - Thousands of years before European contact, the Native American peoples cultivated plants for food, dyes, medicines, and textiles, domesticated animals, established patterns of trade and built cities, developed intricate religious beliefs, and constructed social and political organizations ranging from kin-based bands and tribes to city-states and confederations. They adapted to demanding environments and reshaped them to meet their needs.

A Fateful Encounter - Food was a highly traded item. Notice the rats on the barrels? They symbolize the diseases which were commonly spread during the European contact period. Also, if you noticed the horse featured nearby, the reintroduction of horses to the Americas in the 16th century drastically changed the life of Native Americans in the Plains. This particular animal taxidermy was a later addition to the exhibit from a local farmer whose horse died.

The Bison Hunt - Created in 1966, The Bison Hunt was the largest open diorama in the world at the time. It portrays an event common to the Plains Native Americans from the 1700s-1800s. Today, the diorama is still recognized for its effective depiction of authentic emotion expressed by the warriors, horses, and bison alike. Additionally, a miniature diorama along the front edge depicts a bison hunting method used prior to European contact.

The European Presence - The first Europeans to visit Wisconsin may have been during the early 1600s to discover a water route to the Pacific. They didn't find one, but found instead a rich source of furs on which they could turn a handsome profit. The skillful Native American hunters provided various pelts to the traders and in return would receive knives, beads, and other goods. Military garrisons were established throughout the region to ensure the ready exchange of trade goods.

The Tide of Settlement - Contact with the New World led to the European colonization of the Americas. While the population of Eurasian peoples in the Americas grew steadily, indigenous people were pushed into other territories and the population plummeted. Conflict and warfare with Europeans further reduced populations and disrupted traditional societies.

Myth of the Vanishing American Indian - The establishment of the newly formed U.S. government created progressively constricting laws, further eroding the Native American peoples' control over their lands and way of life. Yet despite these trials, they displayed an enduring strength: Native American individuals contributed significantly throughout modern warfare, serve as active citizens in our American democracy, play a valuable part in civil rights advocacy, and generously contribute to local communities and global sustainability efforts. Hence, this exhibit stands as a tribute to their story of survival.

QUESTION PROMPTS FOR EXPLORING THE EXHIBIT

Which Native American tribes live in the state of Wisconsin?

How did the Native American tribes adapt and overcome the various trials they faced?

How do Native American tribes significantly contribute and enhance our society today?

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