

The Governor Who Married His Daughter: U-M's Relationship To "Unceded" Sugar Island

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Argument

The University of Michigan should re-evaluate its relationship with the Osborn Preserve on Northern Michigan's Sugar Island, based on the complex history of the land, Chase Osborn's complicated legacy, and the university's dealings with Native peoples.



"Big Duck" Duck Island 1936 (looking north)." Osborn, Chase S. Subject files (not always including CSO) Duck Island and other Upper Peninsula (?) views, ca. 1940. Box 144. Chase S. Osborn Papers, Bentley Historical Library, U-M.



Davis, Kenneth and Michigan. Land Economic Survey. Map of Sugar Island, Chippewa County, Michigan. [Publisher not identified], 1932. Bentley Historical Library, U-M.

History of Sugar Island

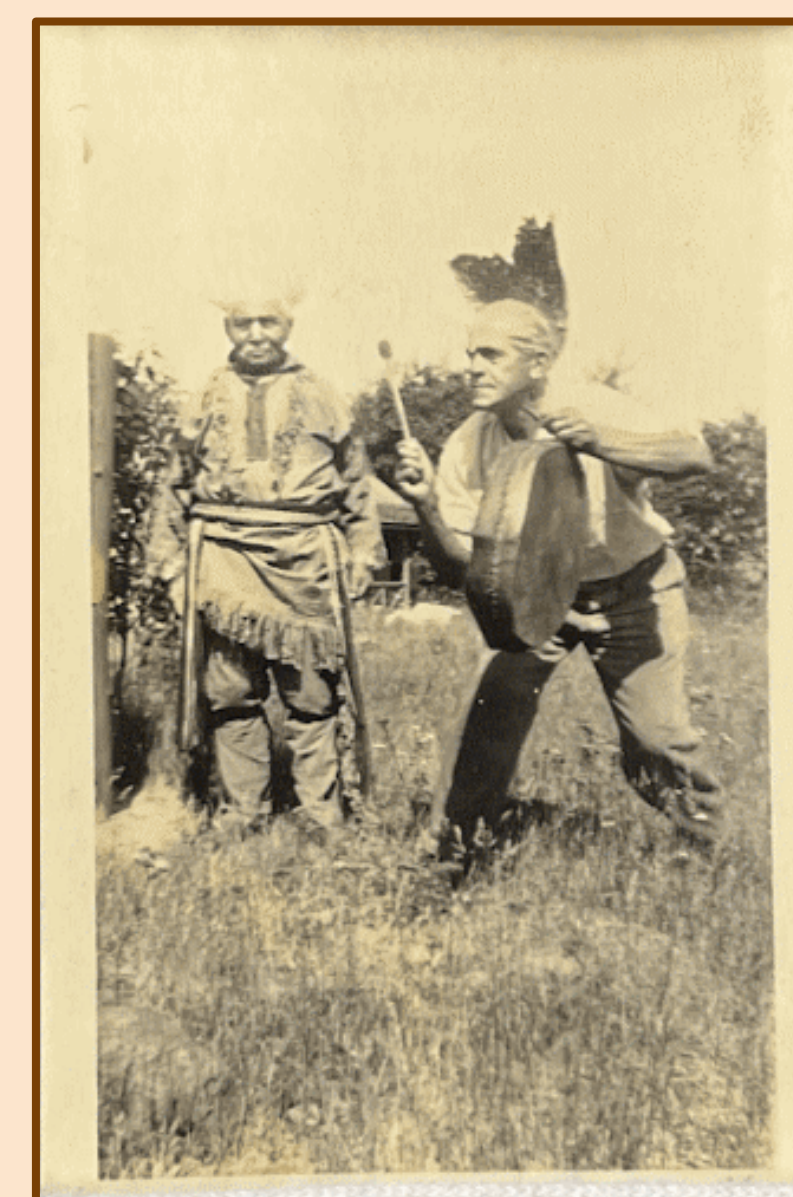
Sugar Island is a homeland to the Anishinaabeg people, mainly the Chippewa and Odawa. Due to ambiguous boundary definitions after the War of 1812, evidence supports that Sugar Island was never legally ceded to the United States.

- 1814 Treaty of Ghent: Recognized the ambiguity of the border near Sugar Island and catalyzed land surveys
- 1842 agreement: Recognized the U.S.'s right to *negotiate* with native peoples for land possession.
- 1836 Treaty of Washington: Sugar Island not under jurisdiction for cession. Senate ratification takes permanent reservations
- 1855 Treaty of Detroit: "Compromise" in which the Ottawa and Chippewa release the U.S. of liability for the 1836 treaty.

Following these agreements and treaties, settlers and land companies bought portions of Sugar Island until the Anishinaabe tribes of the region had lost all recognized reservation lands. Between 1908 and 1929, Chase Osborn acquired most of the south end of the island from friends, land companies, and the state. In 1929, Osborn granted this preserve to U-M, allowing its use for anything so long as he be allowed to reside there until death. The land became part of the U-M Biological Station, which it remains under today.

"The Incredible Osborn"

- Lived between 1860-1949
- Newspaper owner, grew prominent in the iron ore industry
- University of Michigan Regent 1908-1911
- Governor of Michigan 1911-1912
- Celebrated as an author, philanthropist, "geologist, seismologist, ornithologist...and explorer."



"Duck Island Aug. 1974, Dancing Chippewa War Dance." Osborn, Chase S. Formal portraits (see also UAm) Middle years, As governor and public figure. Box 144. Chase S. Osborn Papers, Bentley Historical Library, U-M.



"C. Osborn—portrait." Osborn, Chase S. Formal portraits (see also UAm) Middle years, As governor and public figure. Box 144. Chase S. Osborn Papers, Bentley Historical Library, U-M.

Chase's Complexities



"Stellanova and Chase Osborn, September 8, 1935, Lafayette, Indiana." Osborn, Chase S. Informal portraits (see also UAm) with Stella Osborn. Box 144. Chase S. Osborn Papers, Bentley Historical Library, U-M.

Ne-on-Gib and Benaysee: Indigenous brothers who were groundkeepers for the preserve, both during and after Osborn's life

Stellanova Osborn: Chase and Stella began writing letters while she was in college. After he quietly separated from his first wife, the two posed as adopted father and daughter for decades, then married two days before Chase's death.

Stellanova lived on the Osborn Preserve until her death in 1988.

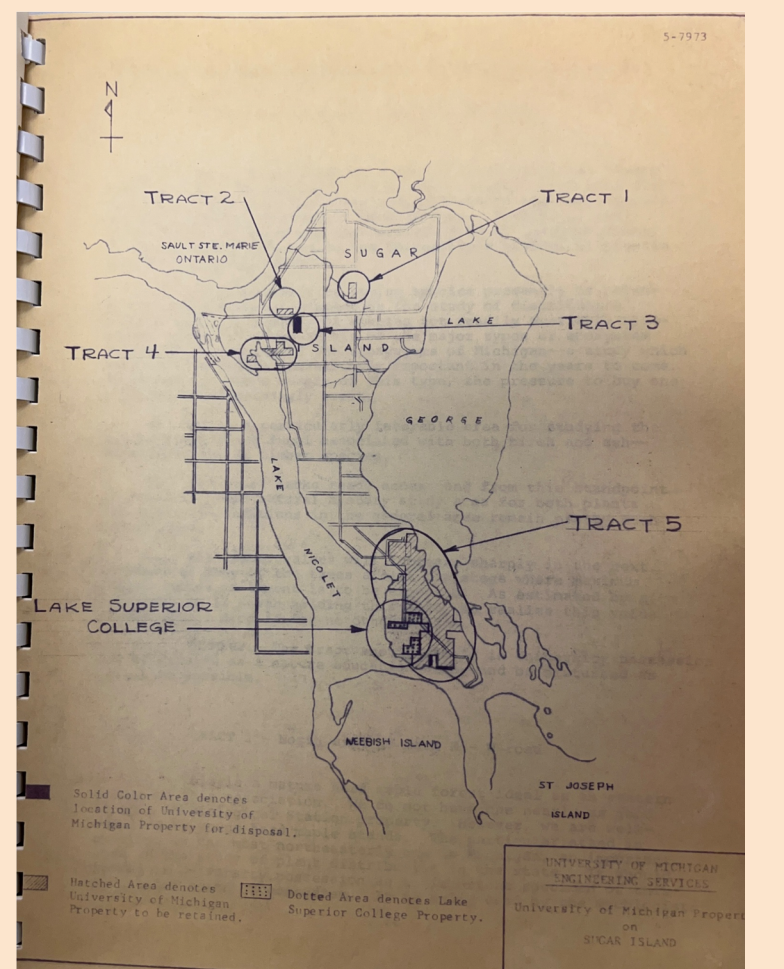
Funding sent to Michigamua: a U-M student organization whose "Indian" theme and practices mocked Native traditions



"The Detroit Free Press Sunday Graphic, March 2, 1941." Osborn, Chase S. Biography, Articles and Pamphlets (2). Box 110. Chase S. Osborn Papers, Bentley Historical Library, U-M.

1972 Land Transfer

- Regents approve the sale of 40 acres to the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians (at \$200 more than what it was worth), claiming it would allow them to achieve federal status
- Appraisal in 1968 found "Tract 3" (40 acres) disposable



"Map of Osborn Preserve 1968 Appraisal." Meeting of Board of Regents Agenda: September 20, 1968, Exh. N-4 (Degrees) thru Exh. B-5 (Other) Vol. 2. Box 122. Board of Regents Papers, Bentley Historical Library, U-M.



Paul Johnson Obituary, February 23, 2023. Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. <https://www.sagchip.org/news.aspx?newsid=4972>

- Campus pressures: AIU teach-ins, protests against skeleton display, first complaint filed against Michigamua, Paul Johnson lawsuit
- This sets a precedent for U-M's "land back" and land selling actions towards indigenous groups

Going Forward

Burt Lake Example:

In 2018, Professor Joseph Gone and John Petoskey requested that U-M acknowledge the history of the Burt Lake Burnout, as Burt Lake is part of U-M's Biological Station. This resulted in website restructures and course implementation for SEAS students. The same response could be applied to the Osborn Preserve, which is part of the Biological Station.

Proposed actions for the Osborn Preserve:

- Sugar Island land acknowledgement on SEAS website
- Course implementation for students at Osborn Preserve, which educates on the native history of the land
- Co-management of land between U-M and the Sault Tribe

References

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Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, <https://www.saulttribe.com/>
The Michigan Daily Digital Archives