

THE HISTORY OF THE ODAWA HOMECOMING POW WOW

By Winnay Wemigwase, LTBB Tribal Citizen

The first “Indian Naming Ceremony,” which served to honor those who helped Native people and their causes, was held near what is now the Harbor Master’s office in Harbor Springs, MI, in 1934.

At these ceremonies, non-Indian individuals were “adopted” into the tribe and given Indian names. These ceremonies continued for eight years with one person adopted each year. No ceremonies were held due to the war from 1942 to 1945. The ceremonies resumed in 1946.

On November 9, 1947, the Michigan Indian Foundation, Inc. was founded. The purpose of this group was to preserve Native culture and to help the local Native community. With the continual increase of spectators at the Indian Naming Ceremonies, the foundation initiated construction on an updated amphitheater in the spring of 1948. This outdoor theater would be known as the Harbor Springs Ottawa Indian Stadium.

The naming ceremonies came to an end approximately 10 years later. These large scale events changed from the Naming Ceremonies to a yearly production of the play “Hiawatha.” These pageants were described as very elaborate and involved a lot of local Native families, dedication and hard work. The Hiawatha Pageant was performed in the Ottawa Indian Stadium until the 1960s.

In 1992, the First Annual Odawa Homecoming Pow Wow was held at the Ottawa Stadium in downtown Harbor Springs. It was hosted by the Andrew J. Blackbird Museum, and the committee was chaired by Shirley Naganashe-Oldman. It served to bring our people back to the stadium for singing and dancing and to educate the local community about who we are as contemporary Odawak. The Homecoming Pow Wows were held there yearly through 2001.

The pow wow moved from the Ottawa Stadium to the current Pleasantview Road location in 2002. The current location brought the pow wow to tribal property and to the center of our community. It sits adjacent to the LTBB Governmental Center and our Natural Resource Department building, both places being central to the daily business of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.

As hosts of the Annual Odawa Homecoming Pow Wow, the LTBB community continues its tradition of celebrating who we are through song and dance.