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The Tribal Reorganization of the Stockbridge-Munsee: Essential Conditions in the Re-Creation of a Native American Community, 1930–1942

By John C. Savagian

THE Stockbridge-Munsee Community is a small rural village of about 700 people located in Shawano County, Wisconsin. Community members live in contemporary houses, travel in automobiles, dress according to the fashions of the time, attend the same schools, and shop at the same stores as their rural counterparts in nearby Bowler and Gresham. But rather than being formed by the slow accumulation of disparate immigrant groups who chose to settle in the Cutover to escape crowded cities, or to farm as their ancestors did, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community is the end result of a long and at times torturous journey of a band of principally Mahican Indians from the colonial frontiers of western Massachusetts.

In 1734, while living along the Housatonic River, a small band of Mahicans chose to abandon their ancestral ways and settle on a six-acre plot of land in the village of Stockbridge. What lured them was Christianity, as well as their desire to learn and

experience at first hand the ways of the Euro-American. Following the American Revolution, though supportive of the Colonies in both blood and spirit, these “Stockbridge” Indians were evicted from their lands. Therein began what they refer to as their own “trail of tears”: six migrations over a period of nearly seventy years. Their lands, held in common, and improved with every turn of the plow and stroke of the hammer, were repeatedly lost. Time after time the Stockbridge settled on lands negotiated in good faith, worked hard to improve them, only to be forced out by covetous whites or other bands of Indians. Yet they persevered. New land, it seemed, could always be found. Another migration could always be made. What mattered most was that the small band stayed together and kept its identity intact.¹

EDITOR'S NOTE: A slightly different version of this article was first presented at a conference entitled “Respecting American Indian Identity: A Perspective from History and Culture.” Jointly sponsored by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin System, the conference was held November 7–9, 1991, in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

¹ The definitive history of the Stockbridge-Munsee has yet to be written. The best single text of their days in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, is Patrick Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge* (Lincoln, 1992). The following works offer a general but varied account: E. M. Rutenber, *History of the Indian Tribes of Hudson's River* (Albany, 1871); Electa F. Jones, *Stockbridge, Past and Present; or Records of an Old Mission Station* (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1854); Jedidiah Morse and Jeremy Belknap, *Report on the Oneida, Stockbridge and Brotherton Indians 1796*, in *Indian Notes and Monographs, A Series of Publications Relating to the American Aborigines*, No. 54 (re-

Despite their desire to remain a people and a nation, by the mid-1920's the Stockbridge-Munsee had ceased to exist as a federally recognized tribe. Torn by political factions, exacerbated both by repeated moves and debate over their relationship with the predominant white culture, the people who call themselves Muh-He-Con-Neew more closely resembled their German and Scandinavian neighbors than a tribe of Native Americans. Like their neighbors struggling with the rural depression, the Indians of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community had become a typical mix of poor farmers, unemployed day laborers, and rural indigents.

By all rights, the story should have ended there. As advocates of assimilation theorized, the Stockbridge-Munsee were supposed to melt into the boiling cultural cauldron of America, lose their "Indianness," till the soil, raise families, and assume the same goals and aspirations as their white rural neighbors, becoming one more segment in a population of what one Congressman called "civilized tax-payers."²

Instead, in the decade between 1932 and 1942, a small nucleus of Stockbridge-Munsee led a revival of tribal spirit that culminated in the rebirth of the tribe. These new leaders cast a wide net throughout the region, gathering tribal members and settling them on a portion of their old reservation. They wrote a constitution and held elections to form a new tribal government. They built homes, drilled wells, laid out new

roads. Perhaps equally important, the Stockbridge-Munsee committed themselves to reconnecting with their Indian heritage through history projects, craft classes, and annual powwows.

In one sense, this Phoenix-like resurrection can be attributed to the political and social genius of John Collier and his able band of anthropologists and lawyers who attempted to reorganize not only Indian life but also the Bureau of Indian Affairs during Collier's tenure as Commissioner of Indian Affairs (1934–1945). Collier, Georgia-born and Columbia-educated, brought high credentials to the job: adviser to the Pueblo Indians in their fight against the Bursum Bill; executive secretary of the American Indian Defense Association; editor of *American Indian Life*. But it was Collier's experience with the massive influx of immigrants into New York City during 1910–1918 that set the pattern for his efforts as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. While at the People's Institute, he had observed a modern industrialized society destroy the social bonds and group controls of the Old World, replacing them with an individualistic and materialistic world-view he found troubling. To John Collier, Native American societies exhibited similar group controls that were destined for extinction by an "Americanization" that in his words "pulverized" tribal bonds.³

Collier's appointment as Commissioner of Indian Affairs gave him the opportunity to help Native Americans preserve their culture by utilizing their "latent civic force."⁴ The seminal document of Collier's plan was the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (the IRA, also known as the Wheeler-

printed, New York, 1955); John N. Davidson, *Muh-He-Ka-Ne-Ok: A History of the Stockbridge Nation* (Milwaukee, 1893); Deirdre Almeida, "The Stockbridge Indian in the American Revolution," in *Historical Journal of Western Massachusetts*, 5:34–39 (Fall, 1975); and Philip S. Colee, "The Housatonic-Stockbridge Indians: 1734–1749" (doctoral dissertation, University of New York, 1977).

² Thomas Skinner (Dem., South Carolina) made this comment during debate on the General Allotment Act of 1887. See Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The American Indian and the United States: A Documentary History, Vol. III* (New York, 1973), 1849–1850.

³ Stephen Kunitz, "The Social Philosophy of John Collier," in *Ethnohistory*, 18:216–223 (Summer, 1971); Kenneth R. Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform: 1920–1954* (Tucson, 1977), 24–27.

⁴ U.S. Department of Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, *Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Annual Report for Fiscal Year Ended 30 June 1935*, p. 114; Philp, *John Collier's Crusade*, 3.

Howard Bill), a sweeping piece of legislation that sought to restore tribal lands and governments, and, by so doing, to ensure the continued survival of Native American cultures.⁵

Historians of federal Indian policy during the New Deal era have examined in some detail the apex of the pyramid of power and decision-making over Native American life, scrutinizing John Collier's utopian vision of tribal restoration and his methods for achieving it. The trove of information contained in BIA records and Collier's papers offer excellent material to critically appraise the BIA's success or failure in creating what one scholar has called "cooperative commonwealths" in the rural regions of the nation.⁶

But of course the story goes much deeper than that. What made it possible for the Stockbridge-Munsee to reorganize during the 1930's was the confluence of many interdependent factors, of which Collier and his agents of reform were only one. There-

fore, rather than using the Stockbridge-Munsee as a case study for further analysis of Collier's Indian policy, this essay seeks to identify the other main forces which came together to create the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. Its aim is to achieve a better understanding of how fragile a coalition it was, and how unique this decade of reorganization proved to be.

THE Stockbridge move into Wisconsin did not begin propitiously. After the white citizens of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, forced them out following the American Revolution, the tribe relocated in New York on lands offered by the Oneida. Within the decade, further encroachments by whites led them to seek a new settlement on lands allegedly owned by the Delaware Indians along the White River in Indiana. But what the Delaware claimed was theirs to give, Congress claimed otherwise and withheld the lands from the Stockbridge.⁷ Finally in 1821 the Stockbridge, together with the Oneida and Brotherton, negotiated two treaties with the Menominee and Winnebago for lands east of the Fox River in northeastern Wisconsin (then called the Michigan Territory). Resettled, they once again set about to improve their home, establishing a mission under the guidance of Reverend Jesse Miner, building a school, and farming the land.⁸ And just as before, the tranquility they had sought was disturbed. This time factions within the Menominee and Winnebago tribes contested the treaties, causing the federal government to revoke the agreement. A new treaty in 1831 created a reservation for the Stockbridge of two

⁵ Briefly, the final bill sought to establish the Native American prerogative of tribal assembly, association, and government; allow and assist in the creation of new and the restoration of old reservations; overturn the 1887 Dawes Act by forbidding the allotment of lands still held by Native Americans in communal ownership; provide a framework and budget for the purchase of lands opened up under the Allotment Act; prevent the sale, gift, or exchange of any lands without the approval of the Secretary of Interior; reorganize the Indian Service to better place Native Americans in positions of influence; and provide a fund of the issuance of grants and loans for educational purposes. See Washburn, *The American Indian and the United States*, 2210–2217.

⁶ Works on federal Indian policy during the Collier era include: Graham D. Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934–35* (Lincoln, 1980); and Lawrence C. Kelly, "The Indian Reorganization Act: The Dream and the Reality," in the *Pacific Historical Review*, 44:291–312 (August, 1975). One book that offers Indian perspectives on the IRA, generated from a 1983 conference, is Kenneth R. Philp, ed., *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Salt Lake City, 1986). Two relatively objective accounts of the period from Indian Service personnel are S. Lyman Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy* (Washington, D.C., 1973), and Theodore Haas, "The Indian Reorganization Act in Historical Perspective," in William Kelly, ed., *Indian Affairs and the Indian Reorganization Act: The Twenty-Year Record* (Tucson, 1954), 9–25.

⁷ Jones, *Stockbridge, Past and Present*, 102.

⁸ Davidson, *Muh-He-Ka-Ne-Ok*, 23. Upon the death of Rev. Miner in 1829, the famed Rev. Cutting Marsh became director of the Stockbridge Mission. See Marion J. Mochon, "Stockbridge-Munsee Cultural Adaptation: Assimilated Indians," in the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 112:201–202 (June, 1968).

townships east of Lake Winnebago in what is now Calumet County, Wisconsin.⁹

While at this reservation, the Stockbridge merged with the Munsee Indians upon their arrival from New York. As one of the bands of the Delaware (or Lenapi) Indians, the Munsee regarded the Stockbridge as relatives from earlier contact with Mohicans along the Housatanic River valley, from whence the Stockbridge originated. From then on, the tribe was known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Indians.¹⁰

During the 1830's the Stockbridge-Munsee were beset by an internal conflict that would in time mirror the national debate over the Indian question; namely, would Indians seek a separate existence from white American society or would they opt for assimilation with the prevailing culture? By and large, federal efforts to promote assimilation involved the Indians' removal from their tribal setting through individual allotments of land to the heads of each Indian family. Supporters of allotment assumed that if Native Americans would accept private ownership of the land as the white man had, and adopt all the attendant legalities and cultural notions it implied (such as title and deed, wealth and status), they would be well on the road to civilization. "It is doubtful," wrote the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1876, summarizing the popular view, "whether any high degree of civilization is possible without individual ownership."¹¹

Although the allotment plan would not see fruition on a large scale until the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the major Indian wars were over and the tribes were restricted to reservations, the controversy over assimilation was as old as the first cultural exchange between Columbus and the Taino on the island of San Salvador. The debate within the Stockbridge-Munsee tribe split the tribe into two camps: the Citizen Party, which sought U.S. citizenship and supported individual allotment of lands; and the In-

dian Party, which desired to retain both communal ownership of land and federal annuities.¹² To openly display their philosophies, Citizen Party members sought to dress like their white neighbors while Indian Party members continued to cloak themselves in the traditional blanket.¹³

This split proved far more damaging than simply a difference over the tribe's style of clothing. Buoyed by the desires of the Citizen Party, Congress in 1843 ordered the allotment of all Stockbridge-Munsee lands and offered citizenship to the entire tribe.¹⁴ The Citizen Party eagerly accepted these terms and was promised individual tracts of Stockbridge-Munsee land. The Indian Party, led by John W. Quinney, rejected the terms, forcing Congress to repeal it and order a new enrollment to partition lands to better represent the two factions.¹⁵ To foster a solution, Congress passed an amendment to the treaty in 1849 that offered the Indian Party lands west of the Mississippi River and a one-time payment of \$25,000 for resettlement and improvement of those lands if the tribe would leave the newly created state of Wisconsin. Unfortunately, no land was forthcoming, although some Stockbridge delegates were sent west to scout for it. As the Stockbridge-Munsee Community tells the story: "Thus matters continued, government neglecting to provide us with lands; and the Stockbridge nation having, on the faith of the treaty, surrendered title to some of the most valuable lands in Wisconsin at a moderate com-

⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *An Investigation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs*, House Rept., 82 Cong., 2 sess. (1953), 612.

¹⁰ Davidson, *Muh-He-Ka-Ne-Ok*, 38-39.

¹¹ Otis S. Delos, *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands* (Norman, 1973), 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³ Davidson, *Muh-He-Ka-Ne-Ok*, 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ U.S. Congress, House, *An Investigation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs* (1953), 989.

pensation, were unable to move away, simply because they knew not whither to go.”¹⁶

Finally, the Stockbridge-Munsee negotiated a new treaty and abandoned the Calumet area. This Treaty of 1856 ceded all right of tribal ownership to previous land holdings in Wisconsin and Minnesota and allotted individual parcels of land to members of the Citizen Party. The remainder of the tribe moved to a new reservation in Shawano County, Wisconsin, ceded on their behalf by the Menominee Indians.¹⁷ When the passage of the Dawes or General Allotment Act of 1887 made allotment Congress’s principal method for breaking up Indian nations, the Stockbridge-Munsee were subjected to a series of federal acts that concluded in 1910 with the final breakup of their communally held lands in Shawano County.¹⁸

¹⁶ “To the Hon. the Senate and House of Representative, in Congress convened, the petition of the undersigned, the Chiefs, Head-men and Warriors of the Stockbridge Tribe of Indians, respectfully showeth” (Calumet City, Wisconsin, Stockbridge, 1865), 2–3, Pamphlet, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

¹⁷ U.S. Congress, House, *An Investigation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs* (1953), 990. As America advanced westward, allotment proved more than simply a method of “helping Indians to assimilate.” It was also a tool for opening vast tracts of Indian lands to advancing waves of settlers and eastern companies. “Surplus” Indian lands were to be freed for white American consumption, placating the new railroad, timber, and mining consortiums and relieving the overcrowded eastern cities through the gift of Indian territory. The Stockbridge-Munsee labeled the plan “principally an instrument whereby the Stockbridge Indians were deprived of their former holdings of land,” a policy which “has wrought great disaster, hardship and suffering upon the Stockbridge Tribe of Indians as a whole and as individuals.” See “FSA History,” in the Arvid E. Miller Sr. Papers, p. 1, in the Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Library, Stockbridge-Munsee Reservation, Shawano County (hereinafter cited as SMHL).

¹⁸ Congress actually began to whittle away at the Stockbridge-Munsee’s Shawano County lands in 1871 (16 Stat. 404–407). Three more Acts followed: March 2, 1895 (28 Stat. 894, c.188); April 21, 1904 (33 Stat. 210, c.1402); and June 21, 1906 (34 Stat. 356, c.3504). See U.S. Congress, House, *An Investigation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs* (1953), 991. See also Kenneth L. Payton to Leonard Miller, Jr., April 5, 1974, 360/Land Acquisition, General, Stockbridge Reservation, Ashland, Wisconsin, Great Lakes Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of Interior (hereinafter cited as BIA, GLA).

BY the 1920’s the former Stockbridge-Munsee reservation had become checkboarded with titles held by non-Indians and lumber companies. Prior to allotment, the Stockbridge-Munsee had managed to subsist on small farming or through employment in logging operations on or near their reservation. Once the lands were allotted and the 160 acres conveyed to each adult Stockbridge-Munsee male, many lost their titles through tax delinquency. Others went into debt and sold their lands to the lumber companies that coveted the Community’s large tracts of white pine. A few hung on, only to see inheritance squabbles shrink the land into smaller and smaller sections. Such was a common experience for many Indians whose lands were subjected to individual allotment.¹⁹ Allotment and rapid land sales made moot the past treaties that mandated federal assistance to the Stockbridge-Munsee. The 1910 enrollment, taken for the purposes of final allotment, recorded 582 members of the Stockbridge-Munsee, but in the eyes of the federal government, the Stockbridge-Munsee had ceased to exist. They were on their own to adapt to a predominant and still alien culture that looked with predatory eyes at their forested lands.

The severe economic troubles that gripped rural Wisconsin in the mid-1920’s further eroded the ability of individual Stockbridge-Munsee to keep their lands. “During the depression,” noted tribal

¹⁹ The problems of the Stockbridge-Munsee typified the troubled policy of the General Allotment Act. Heralded at the 1889 Lake Mohonk Conference as a tribe which had made great strides in imitating the western pioneers, the Stockbridge-Munsee nonetheless did not learn fast enough the rudiments of real estate to save their lands from marauding speculators and timber barons. See Lake Mohonk Conference on the Indian Report, *1889 Proceedings of the 7th Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian* (Clearwater, [Florida?], 1979), p. 82, card 9. A good scholarly description of the inheritance trap of allotment is provided by Kirke Kickingbird and Karen Ducheneaux in *One Hundred Million Acres* (New York, 1973), 31.



Arvid E. Miller, president of the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribal Council, doing silverwork in the Stockbridge Arts and Crafts Shop. All photos used with this article are courtesy the Arvid E. Miller Memorial Library Museum, Bowler.

member Bernice Miller Pigeon, “there were only one or two persons who really hung onto their own section of land.”²⁰ Adequate housing was a particular problem. At least three families occupied former chicken coops. A U.S. Indian Service report to Collier noted that “a large number of the Indians who have already lost title to their holdings are reduced to ‘squatters’ and ‘shackers.’” Other families were ten-

²⁰ Interview with Bernice Miller Pigeon, Stockbridge-Munsee Community, Wisconsin, July 7, 1982.

ants on former tribal lands. Those Stockbridge-Munsee who had kept their lands usually had mortgaged them for “several times the market value of the land and improvements.”²¹

Shawano County whites, as well as Menominee Indians just to the north, were unhappy with their destitute neighbors. According to complaints from the staff of Bureau of Indian Affairs on the Men-

²¹ *Ibid.*; U.S. Department of Interior, United States Indian Service, *Project Proposal for Stockbridge Indian Project* (1934), p. 3, in SMHL.

ominee Reservation, the “old Stockbridge Reservation” was a bad influence throughout the area and was known as a place “where intoxicating liquor can be obtained and where the immoral conditions are exceedingly bad.”²² Arvid Miller, who served as Stockbridge-Munsee tribal chairman from 1939 to 1965, painted a more human but even starker image of the conditions for the Stockbridge-Munsee in rural Shawano County during the Depression:

Picture these people of some 70 families barely subsisting on the one and one-half dollars per week given them in orders on neighbourhood grocery stores. Visualize the frail under nourished human beings who looked into an empty world each day, their spirits broken, their hearts saddened with the anguish of defeat huddled in their little tar paper shacks and small log shanties in which they had not paid their rents for over a year or more, waiting patiently for the turn of fortune, not enough milk for the babies and for the older folk, the dreaded rotation of meals for those hungry families trying to live on this one and one-half dollars per week.²³

Despite having lost their land base, however, most of the Stockbridge-Munsee remained in the area surrounding their former reservation, particularly the township of Red Springs. In the late 1920's and early 1930's, tribal members experienced a spiritual reawakening of the need to restore their Community. To that end, they became politically active. To the consternation of some area whites who complained that non-taxpayers did not deserve the right to vote, they took control of the Red Springs town board.²⁴ To the Stockbridge-Munsee, the board acted as the surrogate tribal council, giving Community members a sense of control and a psychological assurance that their tribal government was still intact.²⁵ During this

period, Carl Miller, a strong-willed Mohican educated at an Indian school in Hampton, Virginia, served as town chairman of Red Springs. Among the Stockbridge-Munsee, Miller was the closest of anyone to being their Sachem or principal leader. He had been known in his earlier days as a bit of brawler, one who didn't shy from a drink or a fight. His stubborn character would serve him well as he helped guide the Stockbridge-Munsee Community through a bureaucratic maze of federal and state agencies along the way to tribal rebirth.²⁶

ON October 26, 1931, at a meeting in the Red Springs town hall, the Stockbridge-Munsee Business Committee was formed. Its major purpose was to petition the federal government for the reorganization of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. Carl Miller was elected chairman.²⁷ The Business Committee's initiative was well in advance of John Collier's call to reorganize. The source of this ideological impulse to create a Business Committee and reinstate contacts with the Indian Service is unknown. It may reflect the policy changes already taking place at the federal level under the leadership of Charles Rhoads, whose ideas for reform Collier enthusiastically adopted.²⁸ Locally, however, the Busi-

²² 1929 Annual Report, Keshena Agency, R. W. Beyer, Superintendents' Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports from Field Jurisdictions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1907-1938, National Archives, Record Group 75 (hereinafter cited NA, RG 75), M1011, p. 2.

²³ “FSA History,” Arvid E. Miller, Sr. Papers, p. 1, in SMHL.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Interior, United States Indian Service, *Project Proposal* (1934), p. 3.

²⁵ Mochon, “Stockbridge-Munsee Cultural Adaptation,” 206.

²⁶ “Chief Carl Miller, A Nostalgic Look at a Leader of His People,” in *Quin'a Month'a*, 3 (1976), p. 3, in SMHL.

²⁷ “Tribal Reorganization,” Arvid E. Miller, Sr. Papers, Book A, in SMHL.

²⁸ John Collier, “The Genesis and Philosophy of Indian Reorganization Act Policies,” in *Indian Affairs and the Indian Reorganization Act*, 4-5; Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 119-124; Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism*, 15.

ness Committee had encountered nothing but resistance from the superintendent at the Keshena Agency who had jurisdiction over the Stockbridge-Munsee. Prior to their reorganization, the annual reports of Keshena Superintendent William Beyer had made little mention of the Stockbridge-Munsee, usually offering the pat answer on reply forms that they were a “non-tribe” for which no information was available.²⁹ Even as the tribe began to reorganize, initial assistance from Keshena was limited. Eventually Collier would hand tribal jurisdiction over to the Tomah Agency, his assistant complaining that the Menominee Indians had “rigidly excluded the Stockbridge Indians from receiving help and education benefits.”³⁰

Superintendent Beyer was the most likely source of trouble. He was a holdover from the administration of Herbert Hoover and a firm believer in the need for allotment of the Menominee reservation. Allotment, he repeatedly told his superiors, was “absolutely necessary in order to further the course of industrial advancement among these people.” Besides, he concluded, “there has never been a record of any people living successfully a communal life.”³¹ Clearly, Beyer did not fit in with the new thinking at Collier’s Bureau. In 1934 Collier would replace him with Ralph Fredenberg, a Menominee Indian who had begun working for the Indian Service in 1915 and had steadily moved up through the ranks.³²

The well-organized Business Committee moved ahead despite the lack of assistance at the local level. Their preparations paid off when, early in 1934, according to

one tribal member, good news arrived at Red Springs: “Someone (BIA) from Menominee came through and said Government would buy up options. Had a paper with a ribbon tied around. It was authorization to reestablish Indian reservations. So we asked for our old Res. back. Buy up what used to be our land.”³³

Upon receipt of this good news, Carl Miller sent a letter to Commissioner Collier with a modest proposal. He asked for the establishment of a reservation of a few thousand acres, “at least half of which should be good agriculture land so that we could plant and raise good gardens and feed a cow or two.” A series of questions followed: “Shall we make a request by petition signed by the whole tribe? Shall we petition our Senators and Congressmen? Just what shall we do to convince the government that we deserve another chance?”³⁴

Within four days the Commissioner had responded. Collier assured Miller, “[W]e do want to get land exactly as you indicate and we are going to try.” Collier requested from Miller “facts and proof” that the Stockbridge-Munsee people overwhelmingly supported the Business Committee’s efforts. Collier did not outline what kind of proof he wanted; he did not mention elections, the formation of a constitution, and the like. But he did make it clear that legislation was being created that would

²⁹ 1929, 1930, 1931 Annual Reports, Keshena Agency, R. W. Beyer, Superintendents’ Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports from Field Jurisdictions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1907–1938, M1011, NA, RG 75.

³⁰ E. J. Skidmore (acting Assistant to the Commissioner) to the Secretary of Interior, December 29, 1936, Tomah Decimal File, 1926–1950, Box 40, NA–GL, RG 75.

³¹ 1930 Annual Report, Keshena Agency, M1011, NA, RG 75, Section 3, p. 4.

³² Fredenberg obituary, in U.S. Department of Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, “Indians at Work” (June, 1939), 6–8. Fredenberg would prove to be both an excellent representative of Collier’s commitment to placing Indians in more important positions in the BIA and a diligent proponent of Stockbridge-Munsee reorganization. He served as Superintendent of Keshena until 1940 when he was transferred to the Grande Ronde-Siletz Agency in Oregon. Fredenberg was forty-six when he died of a heart attack in September, 1941.

³³ “On the New Reservation,” Elmer L. Davids, Sr. Papers, Bosie’s B.S. Book, SMHL.

³⁴ Carl Miller to John Collier, January 2, 1934, Carlton Leo Miller Papers, File II, SMHL.



Carl Miller standing by his home.

improve their chances for tribal reorganization.³⁵ For the first time in years, the Stockbridge-Munsee felt someone in charge in Washington was listening.

THE Business Committee immediately began to assemble its case for reorganization. It solicited testimonials from important members of Shawano County such as the head of the local chamber of commerce and the postmaster. Invariably these advocates among the white community argued principally that a new reservation and jobs would go far to get the Stockbridge-Munsee off the relief rolls.³⁶ Miller made himself available for speeches wherever an interest in their plight was shown. Since few tribesmen owned automobiles, he was forced to walk wherever necessary to speak on behalf of the tribe. Weekly he walked the twenty miles to Keshena, on the Menominee Res-

ervation, to discuss the details for tribal reorganization.³⁷

To the Stockbridge-Munsee, approval of the IRA by their Indian peers was just as important as approval by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, especially since there was no guarantee that the legislation would pass Congress. A strong show of support was necessary for both Collier and the Stockbridge-Munsee. To that end, on April 24, 1934, Stockbridge-Munsee delegates Carl Miller, Cornelius Aaron, Adrian Yocum, and Nelson Gardner journeyed northward to Hayward, in Sawyer County, to participate in one of the ten Indian congresses called by the Bureau of Indian

³⁵ John Collier to Carl Miller, 6 January 1934, Carlton Leo Miller Papers, File II, SMHL.

³⁶ U.S. Indian Service, *Project Proposal* (1934), exhibits 12, 13, and 15.

³⁷ Interview with Bernice Miller Pigeon, July 7, 1982; "A Memorial Honoring Carl L. Miller," in *Quin'a Month'a*, 5:2 (March, 1976), SMHL.

Affairs to discuss the Indian Reorganization bill. Delegates from tribes in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan gathered to hear Assistant Commissioner William Zimmerman, who took Collier's place and read the Commissioner's speech, denounce the past laws of the nation directed toward the Indians as "wicked and stupid." Like any good politician, Collier had taken care to distance his administration from the failed policies of the past. The previous policy of the federal government, he said, was "to rob the Indians [to] crush Indian life and even to crush the family life of Indians." His speech was laced with good words that most Indians wanted to hear. John Collier promised that things would be different with his Bureau.³⁸

At the close of the Hayward congress, each tribe presented its views on the bill. Most deferred to their elders back home, stating that while they saw much good in the bill, they were not empowered to speak for the entire tribe. Not so with the Stockbridge delegation. The Rev. Cornelius Aaron informed the assembly that "the Stockbridge delegation comes here with instructions to accept that bill to the man!" He called the legislation a promise of better relations with the white race: "Ill will, hatred, prejudice have all been laid aside and the silent road of glory leads through enlightenment through enactment of the provisions of the Wheeler-Howard Bill of Indian Rights."³⁹ Carl Miller was exuberant, calling the event "a great meeting for a great purpose—1,000 Indians, counting visitors, and all with one mind."⁴⁰ The following summer, after an equally vigorous debate, Congress passed by a large majority, and President Roosevelt signed into law the Indian Reorganization

Act. Though the Act had been reduced to eight pages from an original fifty-two, the principal intent of the bill to initiate the formation of new reservations and tribal councils remained intact.⁴¹

In December of 1934, by a near-unanimous vote of 166 to 1, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community voted to accept the Indian Reorganization Act.⁴² What had up to that moment been an abstract exercise in hope was now to become the actual reorganization of the Stockbridge-Munsee. Land would have to be located, lengthy negotiations entered into with the owners, and finally, somehow, money would have to be found for financing the purchase.

The land acquisition program the Stockbridge-Munsee counted on was no sure thing; but, judging from tribal files, the Business Committee believed that assurances from Collier were worth their weight in gold. Unfortunately, Collier's prescribed budget for land acquisition was highly speculative, based as it was on the whims of Congress. The final budget for the purchase of land titles (including water and surface rights) under Section 5 of the IRA for the use of Native Americans was \$2 million a year.⁴³ It has been estimated that to purchase land from those who had become hereditary landowners

⁴¹ The debate over the merits of the IRA and the final Act which emerged from Congress, however, made it clear that the preservation of a Native American heritage was not a congressional priority. Evidence for this comes from the exclusion of key provisions in the final bill: the statement in Title II that emphasized the desire to promote the preservation and enhancement of Indian culture was deleted and the Indian Claims Commission was eliminated. Collier had hoped to use the Commission to replace the antiquated system operated by the Indian Service. There were no attorneys and no judges, and appeals could only go to the Secretary of the Interior. See Kelly, "The Indian Reorganization Act," 297; Philp, *Collier's Crusade*, 143.

⁴² Tribal Council Minutes File, December 1934, SMHL; Theodore Haas, *Ten Years of Tribal Government Under I.R.A.*, Tribal Relations Pamphlet No. 1 (Haskell Institute, Chicago, 1947), 3.

⁴³ Washburn, *The American Indian and the United States*, 2212.

³⁸ Speech presented at Hayward, Wisconsin, April 23–24, 1934, in *The John Collier Papers, 1922–1968* (microform, Sanford, North Carolina), reel 30, 0854–55, pp. 2–3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 0885, p. 64.

⁴⁰ Diary, April 24, 1934, Carlton Leo Miller Papers, SMHL.

for consolidation of reservations would have taken at least seventeen years at a total expense of \$35 million under IRA funding. According to the National Resource Board, the amount of land needed to help the Native Americans maintain simply a "basic subsistence level" was 9,700,000 acres, at a cost of \$60 million.⁴⁴ For a national policy to purchase lands for the improvement of the Native American condition, the figure of \$2 million was grossly inadequate. And John Collier was unable to safeguard even that small amount.

Control over Collier's budget rested in the hands of western Congressmen who had opposed the Indian Reorganization Act from the outset. They were not pleased with the use of federal money to purchase lands for Native Americans, especially when they learned the extent of the land program. Since they dominated the House appropriations subcommittee which reviewed the Interior Department's budget requests, they were able to further reduce the purchasing power of the IRA to \$1 million a year. This forced the Commissioner to look elsewhere to secure funds promised to provide to tribes like the Stockbridge-Munsee.⁴⁵

THE first program Collier pursued for land acquisition was the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), administered by Harry Hopkins. Established by Congress on May 12, 1933 (48 Stat. 55), FERA was to work

with state emergency relief administrations to assist rural families hurt by drought and unemployment.⁴⁶ Besides providing direct relief, FERA was also mandated to buy up farmland which had fallen into disuse. Under the Submarginal Land Retirement Program of Rural Rehabilitation, occupants were to be removed to better farmlands, thus "rehabilitating" them and reducing the relief rolls of the states.⁴⁷ On July 17, 1933, as a result of Collier's persistence, Hopkins issued a memorandum expanding the program to include "Indianwards as well as nonwards."⁴⁸ The result was a merging of FERA funding with the land acquisition clause of the Indian Reorganization Act. Lands classified as submarginal were to be used to supply those Native Americans who had accepted the IRA and had shown a need for land.⁴⁹ These submarginal lands were privately held lands the government considered economic failures; they could no longer sustain crop yields, were unproductive as grazing or timberland, and had become or were in the process of becoming badly eroded.⁵⁰ This of course described much of the land held by Native Americans, and the volume of requests from IRA tribes for land was so great that Collier was forced to restrict them to the "greatest need" reservations. He stressed that submarginal land projects were to be established "where local relief problems are most acute." He was pleased with the use of FERA because it was a program that could directly aid the Indians, who were often on the tax-relief rolls. He also acknowledged that by relieving

⁴⁴ Lawrence C. Kelly, "The Indian Reorganization Act: The Dream and the Reality," in the *Pacific Historical Review*, 44:307-308 (August, 1975). The Board further noted (p. 307) that if Native Americans were ever to achieve even a modest living on the level of rural white folk, they would need an additional 15,900,000 acres at a cost of \$69 million.

⁴⁵ Philp, *Collier's Crusade*, 175-176. Ironically, when Collier's actions proved successful, garnering almost \$45 million from other agencies, this further raised the ire of the congressmen, who then voted against any additional funds for the IRA, thus forcing Collier to continue his extra-agency activities. See Kelly, "The Indian Reorganization Act," 306.

⁴⁶ Harold Gross, "Memorandum on Which the National Council of Indians Opportunity Proposal Is Based," p. 1, Farm Security Administration Papers, SMHL.

⁴⁷ Paul W. Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development* (Public Land Law Review Commission, Washington, D.C., 1968), 599.

⁴⁸ Harry Hopkins to State ERA's, memoranda, July 17, 1933, Farm Security Administration Papers, SMHL.

⁴⁹ Kickingbird and Ducheneaux, *One Hundred Million Acres*, 66.

⁵⁰ Gross, "Memorandum," 1.

the state and counties of their burden in providing relief, he was able to gain further "justification of proposed purchases of land for Indian use."⁵¹

The Stockbridge-Munsee fell under the fourth category of the Bureau's listing of five "demonstration Indian areas," namely, "lands for Homeless Indian Bands or Communities now Forming Acute Relief Problems."⁵² This classification helped give the Stockbridge-Munsee early assistance from the Bureau. On May 15, 1934, Collier directed Keshena Superintendent Beyer to provide more information on lands Carl Miller and the Business Committee sought: maps, statistics on the surrounding area, local conditions for both Indian and non-Indian populations, transportation, land usage, etc. Collier stressed the use of local input in the formulation of the project: foresters, farm extension agents, Red Cross, and other welfare workers were to be interviewed.⁵³ The project was completed on October 8, 1934, under the direction of James W. Balmer.

Balmer's survey revealed that by 1934, of an original reservation of over 40,000 acres, the Stockbridge-Munsee land base had been reduced to less than a hundred acres.⁵⁴ As one Community member recalled, many Indians sold out to the lumber companies and then tried to settle on plots of land "far too small to accommodate the rising generation."⁵⁵ Once their lands were sold, a number of Stockbridge-Munsee found work with lumber companies, helping to deforest their former home.⁵⁶ Ironically, while playing a role in

adding denuded lands to the growing blight known as the Wisconsin Cutover, where weak soil made farming tenuous and the practice of clear-cutting spelled eventual economic doom for the lumbermen and their families, the Stockbridge-Munsee created the exact conditions for regaining the lands; for only submarginal lands, cheap and nearly worthless, were to be considered under FERA's program as possible land for homeless Indians.⁵⁷

Balmer's survey team reported that the physical features of the old Stockbridge Reservation land had changed because of the practice of clear-cutting. Once covered by virgin timber of pine and mixed hardwoods, the land was exposed to reveal its rolling slopes with outcroppings of bedrock and glacial boulders. Stumps and a great deal of deadwood littered the area. Brush and poplar saplings covered much of the Cutover, though in a few places decent second-growth timber had begun to take hold. The existing resources would make economic development difficult. A lumber mill would be impossible for at least one generation. Prospects for large-scale farming were just as unlikely. Like much of central Wisconsin, the soils were sandy but generally suitable for grazing and growing timber; but in many areas poor drainage and weak fertility meant cash crops could not be produced without expensive fertilizers and irrigation systems.⁵⁸ Three-quarters of the land was listed as "other" than cropland, forest or woodlands, the majority being cutover brush and swamps.⁵⁹ It was hardly an ideal spot for locating a new community in the midst of an economic depression.

⁵¹ John Collier to William Beyer, Circular, May 15, 1934, Submarginal Land, BIA, GLA, pp. 3-4.

⁵² Gross, "Memorandum," p. 3.

⁵³ John Collier to William Beyer, Circulars, May 15, 1934, Submarginal Land, BIA, GLA, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁴ William Beyer to John Collier, June 11, 1934, "Project Proposal for Stockbridge Indian Project," ex. no. 6.

⁵⁵ Elmer L. Davids, Sr. Papers, P. D5-9, SMHL.

⁵⁶ Interview with Elmer Church, Stockbridge-Munsee Community, Wisconsin, April 25, 1984.

⁵⁷ Lucile Kane, "Settling the Wisconsin Cutovers," in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 40:97 (Winter, 1956-1957).

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey of Shawano County, Wisconsin* (Washington, D.C., 1982), 21-53.

⁵⁹ "Project Proposal for Stockbridge Indian Project," SMHL, p. 5.

THE purchase of Stockbridge “submarginal” lands was conducted on two levels of the federal government. The regional offices worked out the details and secured the options; the Bureau office in Washington sought the funds necessary to make the purchase. In Wisconsin, both the Keshena Indian Agency and the Tomah Indian Agency were involved in the creation of the new Stockbridge-Munsee Community. The Keshena Agency, because of its proximity on the Menominee Reservation twenty miles northeast of the old Stockbridge Reservation, coordinated the surveying of lands and took out options in the name of the Interior Department. All correspondence from prospective sellers went through the Keshena Agency, and questions and directives from Washington concerning the negotiations were always sent to Keshena. In 1936, the federal government transferred to the Tomah Agency complete jurisdiction over the Stockbridge-Munsee people and their lands.⁶⁰

The two Wisconsin agencies proved adept at working together, sometimes anticipating advice coming from the Washington office. Pushing them at the local level was the Stockbridge-Munsee Business Committee. Even before tribal members had voted to accept the stipulations of the IRA, the Committee had begun to enter into negotiations with the principal owners of their former lands. Collier wrote Tomah Superintendent Frank Christy in August of 1934, advising him: “We have been thinking that the Stockbridge Tribe would probably be the band which could be organized and rehabilitated most effectively and most speedily.” By that time, Christy and Fredenberg had already conducted interviews with Carl Miller and gained new data; the major land owners had placed 6,800 acres of land under op-

tion to the Keshena Agency, and were in the process of making another 3,608 acres available.⁶¹

Negotiations had begun as early as June of 1934 (the same month that Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act) with the principal owners of lands within the boundaries of the 1856 reservation. The Brooks and Ross Lumber Company owned most of the best lands, over 7,000 acres in the Town of Bartelme.⁶² Brooks and Ross was a medium-sized lumber company with headquarters at Schofield, in Marathon County. The company was started in the early 1890’s by E. Wellington Brooks and his understudy, John D. Ross. Ross and Walter Bissell were responsible for expanding and diversifying the company’s operations early in the twentieth century. Besides its holdings in Shawano, the company also held extensive tracts of land in Vilas and Iron counties, and lands in the upper peninsula of Michigan.⁶³

Brooks and Ross management’s desire to sell the Bartelme lands was based on a need to liquidate holdings that had become useless cutover. The company wished to sell its cutover lands because the long distance to markets precluded corporate farming and its short-sighted pursuit of logging ruled out reforestation. It was unlikely that the company pursued negotiations as a way to rescue the Stockbridge-Munsee Indians or to support the New Deal policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The managers of Brooks and Ross were

⁶¹ John Collier to Frank Christy, August 2, 1935, Land Acquisition, General, Stockbridge Reservation; J. Stewart to Ralph Fredenberg, February 4, 1935, Tract No. 1-Brooks and Ross; Frank Christy to John Collier, August 8, 1935, Land Acquisition, General, Stockbridge Reservation; Brooks and Ross to Ralph Fredenberg, May 29, 1935, Brooks and Ross (New), BIA, GLA.

⁶² “Project Proposal for Stockbridge Indian Project,” SMHL, p. 4.

⁶³ James J. Lorence and Howard Klueter, *Woodlot and Ballot Box: Marathon County in the Twentieth Century* (Stevens Point, Wisconsin, 1977), 30–31; Louis Marchetti, *History of Marathon County Wisconsin and Representative Citizens* (Chicago, 1913), 522.

⁶⁰ E. J. Skidmore (Acting Assistant to the Commissioner) to the Secretary of Interior, December 29, 1936, Tomah Decimal File, 1926–1950, Box 40, NA, GL RG 75.



The Brooks and Ross headquarters, about 1936.

directed by the Wausau Group, a conservative operation with no taste for “progressive reforms.”⁶⁴ In short, the sole reason Brooks and Ross entered into negotiations with the federal government was to dump what to them would soon become worthless lands.⁶⁵

Furthermore, as became clear at the first meeting with representatives of the Stockbridge Business Committee at the Keshena Agency in June of 1934, Brooks and Ross vice-president Mathew McCullough said the company was only willing to sell the lands if it retained rights to all the remaining merchantable timber, approximately 7 million board feet, after the options had been purchased for the benefit of

the Stockbridge-Munsee. This point was again stressed as a condition of sale by McCullough in a letter he wrote to Superintendent Ralph Fredenberg in 1935: “We had hoped to take off all of the forest products from these lands the past winter but owing to unfavorable weather this was not done, therefore, we would be obliged to reserve such forest products as we wish to remove, for a period of two years.”⁶⁶

On January 8, 1936, President Roosevelt approved six reorganization projects sent from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Regional Office in Minneapolis. The Stockbridge-Munsee Project was included with that of the Twin Lakes, Flat Lake, L’Anse, Bad River, and Lac Court Oreilles reservations. The money budgeted for the Stockbridge-Munsee was \$71,980, second-highest of the six. Options had been accepted for 13,134 acres at a cost of \$68,552 or 95.2 per cent of their budget.⁶⁷ John Collier’s local opera-

⁶⁴ Lorence and Klueter, *Woodlot and Ballot Box*, 127.

⁶⁵ The first meeting was held at the office of Keshena Superintendent William Beyer on June 11, 1934. Present were Mathew McCullough, C. W. Cone, and Herman Furhmen of Brooks and Ross; Carl Miller and Adrian Yocum of the Stockbridge-Munsee Business Committee; and Elrod Putnam, assessor for the Township of Red Springs, but also a Stockbridge Indian. See William Beyer to John Collier, June 11, 1934, “Project Proposal for Stockbridge Indian Project,” SMHL, ex. 6, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Mathew McCullough to Ralph Fredenberg, May 29, 1935, Brooks and Ross (New), BIA, GLA.

⁶⁷ J. M. Stewart to J. W. Balmer, January 8, 1935, Land Acquisition, General, Stockbridge Reservation, BIA, GLA.

tion under Frank Christy, Ralph Frendenberg, and the Stockbridge-Munsee Business Committee had done their jobs well. Now the question was, where would the money come from to buy the lands? Rural Rehabilitation, FERA's land-purchase program that Collier was banking on to fund the purchase, had recently been placed under the control of the Resettlement Agency (RA), a new appendage to the growing Roosevelt bureaucracy. There was a good deal of uncertainty whether the Resettlement Agency would ever secure lands for poor white farmers, let alone landless Indians.

Creation of the RA was the result of a solution Roosevelt proffered to end an ideological conflict within the Agriculture Department. Agriculture Secretary Henry Wallace was at odds with his assistant, Rexford Tugwell, over the department's focus. Wallace wanted to help large, scientific farms; Tugwell sought to protect the interests of the small farmer and tenant laborer who were hurt hardest by the Depression.⁶⁸ Roosevelt solved the problem by wedding small farm programs from other agencies and departments such as Rural Rehabilitation (FERA), Subsistence Homestead (Interior), Land Policy Section (Agricultural Adjustment Administration), and the Farm Debt Adjustment Program (Farm Credit Administration) into one agency which, by Executive Order 7027 (April 30, 1935), became known as the Resettlement Administration.⁶⁹ He then appointed Rex Tugwell to administer the new agency.

Although congressional funding restricted him from attempting little more than resettlement experiments such as the development of middle-class "greenbelt communities" outside Washington, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee, Tugwell did show his

support for John Collier's efforts to resettle landless Indians.⁷⁰ He requested the Commissioner to let him know "whenever the Department of Agriculture can be of any assistance in solving those questions of Indian Development and progress in which we are both so interested."⁷¹ Tugwell's agency may not have been the pot of gold Collier was searching for to settle landless Indians such as the Stockbridge-Munsee, but when revenue allocated under the IRA dried up, his land-acquisition program was able to proceed through funding provided by the Resettlement Administration.

Tugwell's agency was short-lived. In January of 1937 the Resettlement Administration was merged with the Agriculture Department, which had, by an administrative coup, inherited all the former land programs consolidated during the Roosevelt shakeup, plus their staffs and allocations. Under Executive Order 7557, the RA became the Farm Security Administration (FSA), and lands purchased by RA for the Stockbridge-Munsee became known as FSA lands.⁷² Thus title to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community lands was now under control of the Agriculture Department.

THE Stockbridge-Munsee Business Committee appeared to have trouble keeping up with all this bureaucratic and executive shuffling. Because of drastic cuts in funding, only 2,249.88 acres had been purchased when the IRA money ran out. The Business Committee was informed that if it wanted to protect its options on the remaining lands, it should seek monetary assistance from the newly created FSA. Arvid Miller recalled the Committee's decision: "This plan we agreed

⁷⁰ William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York, 1963), 140.

⁷¹ Philp, *Collier's Crusade*, 122.

⁷² Kickingbird and Ducheneaux, *One Hundred Million Acres*, 70; Gross, "Memorandum," ex. 11, p. 3.

⁶⁸ James G. Maddox, "Farm Security Administration" (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1950), 23.

⁶⁹ Gross, "Memorandum," p. 3.



Alice and Harry Chicks.

to because we saw it as a simple and sure way to close out our land program.” Once the Farm Security Administration completed the purchase of lands for the Stockbridge-Munsee, and title to those lands was placed back under the control of the Interior Department, the Community immediately petitioned to have title of the FSA lands transferred to their new tribal government, as had been promised under the IRA.⁷³ This did not happen, though a simple signature by Secretary Harold Ickes would have consummated the transfer.

This was not a situation unique to the Stockbridge-Munsee. The lands of all the

tribes which had accepted the provisions of the IRA remained under the control of the Interior Department.⁷⁴ That department in turn refused to move on these lands without the consent of Congress, which had become upset at the extent of Collier’s land-acquisition program and was scrutinizing every attempted purchase.⁷⁵ Money as well as fear of congressional ire may have motivated the Interior Department to keep title to the land. Harold Gross notes that the Interior Department did not allow Native Americans to use the lands provided under the IRA to cut timber and remove

⁷³ “Farm Security History,” Arvid E. Miller, Sr. Papers, SMHL, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Gross, “Memorandum,” pp. 7–9.

⁷⁵ Kickingbird and Ducheneaux, *One Hundred Million Acres*, 57.

minerals without paying for the privilege. The revenue collected was to be held in "special deposits," but Gross contends they were actually absorbed into the U.S. Treasury. Gross estimates that for the Stockbridge-Munsee purchase alone, \$22,732.12 was recovered over and above the actual cost of those lands.⁷⁶

The question of ownership was officially answered by Tomah's new Superintendent, Peru Farver, in a letter to Harry Chicks, the Community's new tribal president: "The title to these lands is taken in the name of the United States and they will not become the property of the Indian tribe, for whose use they were purchased, until Congressional action is obtained specifically transferring such title."⁷⁷

The problems with appropriations for the IRA left the Stockbridge-Munsee with a divided reservation. The title to 2,249 acres was promised to them once they adopted a corporate charter; 13,000 acres called FSA land remained under the control of the Interior Department, and subject to the whim of Congress. Eventually that situation would generate mistrust, since anyone choosing or being assigned to live on FSA lands had to fill out a disclaimer of ownership, stating that they were merely tenants who had no right to the title and would "vacate said premises upon demand for the possession of said lands by the United States of America."⁷⁸ This promised future trouble. (Indeed the Stockbridge-Munsee would not gain title to the land until 1972.)

The central occupation of the Stockbridge-Munsee Business Committee in the mid-thirties was collecting the tribe's scattered people. Throughout the duration of the land-purchase program, Stockbridge-Munsee families had begun to gather on

the Cutover, taking back land the minute word came that a sale had been secured. Regardless of who had the title—whether it was Resettlement, Farm Security, Interior, or Agriculture—the Stockbridge-Munsee had begun to lay the foundations for the new Stockbridge-Munsee Community. Carl Miller, writing about the universal need for a place to call home, eloquently expressed their driving motivation:

Each of us needs a home, a bit of land, some growing thing, some treasured bit of beauty. Enough to clothe and feed us with a little margin for gracious hospitality. Each of us needs room for the growth of his spirit, the reason for his presence here on this earth.⁷⁹

IN the fall of 1936, five years after forming the Business Committee and two years after passage of the Indian Reorganization Act, the Stockbridge-Munsee began to gather on the cutover lands they were to call Moh-he-con-ock. On September 18, Nelson Gardner's family, with friends assisting, inaugurated a new era for the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. Their new residence was a log house abandoned during the lumbering days of Brooks and Ross. A few words were spoken to mark the moment. Carl Miller compared their situation to a man who challenges a fast-moving stream. If he dives in without first learning to master its strong currents he will soon be calling for help. If instead he takes his time to learn the stream and gain confidence in his own abilities, he will swim away independent.⁸⁰ This analogy of the tribe's struggle to continually adapt to the predominant culture is striking; but, at the time, the excitement of moving "way back in the brush" allowed these IRA pioneers to

⁷⁶ Gross, "Memorandum," pp. 13–15.

⁷⁷ Peru Farver to Harry Chicks, June 22, 1938, Arvid E. Miller, Sr. Papers, SMHL, Book A.

⁷⁸ "United States Department of Agriculture; Farm Security Administration Disclaimer," December 14, 1937, Farm Security Administration Papers, SMHL.

⁷⁹ "Carl Miller," People File, SMHL.

⁸⁰ "Personal Diary," September 18, 1936, Carlton Leo Miller Papers, File II, SMHL.



Bert and Rachel Smith Miller.

ignore the currents of American society which swirled about them.⁸¹ Just as he had at the Hayward Conference, Cornelius Aaron looked with optimism to the future, telling those gathered: “Like the sun of a new day, hope is rising over the Moh-he-con-new.”⁸²

Eleven families were chosen to settle the newly purchased lands that fall. Carl Miller and Superintendent Ralph Fredenberg made the selections. Fredenberg’s official report of the selection process listed the criteria for choosing the families: “need—homeless and landless,” the size of the family, ambition, and the capacity to “make [a] good showing.”⁸³ One tribal member remembered how the last criterion outweighed the others. Instead of need, which qualified so many, the “men and women who were not afraid of work and could be depended on to make a showing for the

Stockbridgers” were the first selections.⁸⁴ Among these were the families of Carl Miller, his son Arvid, Adrian Yoccum, Ken Davids, Nelson Gardner, and Bert Miller.⁸⁵

Judging by their first harvest in the fall of 1937, the first eleven families proved their industrious nature and ability to make a “good showing.” They gathered 500 bushels of potatoes, 500 bushels of corn, fifty bushels of rutabagas, twenty bushels of beets, fifteen bushels of carrots, and 300 squash and pumpkins. They prepared 500 quarts of fruit preserves, gathered thirty tons of hay and corn fodder, and raised eight cows, nine horses, eight hogs, and 125 chickens. “As I said before,” wrote Arvid Miller, “we have all been very busy—and are all very happy. I used to write letters to our commissioner asking him to give us a chance, he gave us this chance and I think that I am justified in saying we are making good.”⁸⁶

⁸¹ Interview with Bernice Miller Pigeon, Stockbridge-Munsee Community, Wisconsin, July 7, 1982.

⁸² “Personal Diary,” September 18, 1936, Carlton Leo Miller Papers, SMHL.

⁸³ “Stockbridge-Munsee: Report on I.R.A. and Resettlement Lands,” March 6, 1939, 360/Land Acquisition, General, Stockbridge Reservation, BIA, GLA, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Arvid E. Miller, Sr. Papers, Book A, SMHL.

⁸⁵ Carlton Leo Miller Papers, File II, SMHL.

⁸⁶ Arvid E. Miller, Sr. Papers, Book A, SMHL; Washburn, *The American Indian and the United States*, 2216.

Philp, *Collier’s Crusade*, 145; Donald Parman, “The Indian and the Civilian Conservation Corps,” in Norris Hundley,



Kenneth Davids.

Once settlement began on their new lands, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community continued to seek government aid. Through the Tomah Indian Agency, the Bureau of Indian Affairs remained their guiding as well as their helping hand during the first decade of tribal reorganization. Assistance came in the form of both direct aid—such as job programs, loans, and grants—and technical and legal advice to the Business Committee (and later the Tribal Council) as they prepared their constitution and corporate charter.

A major success story during their first ten years of reorganization was the Stockbridge-Munsee's utilization of the numerous federal programs implemented during the Depression years to provide aid to rural families. These were not programs created with Native Americans in mind, but rather in response to misery en masse. But without such New Deal programs it is unlikely the tribal leadership would have been as successful in finding both the money and the jobs to keep the Stockbridge-Munsee Community afloat. Without the construc-

tion of new homes, loans for subsistence farming, and employment on work crews to turn the Cutover into a productive timber resource, tribal reorganization might have remained a dream.

Through the Indian Reorganization Act, Collier promised the Stockbridge-Munsee loans and grants to resettle their lands if they adopted a corporate charter and became a federal corporation.⁸⁷ Collier had warned all Native Americans that if they were to succeed in keeping their reservations intact, they would have to organize themselves to compete in the modern world.⁸⁸ Similar to federal regulation of tribal elections, the money administered from a "revolving fund" was under the control of the Secretary of the Interior, who had the power to make rules and regulations regarding their dispersal.⁸⁹ The total amount of the fund began at \$10 million,

⁸⁷ Washburn, *The American Indian and the United States*, 2213.

⁸⁸ Philp, *Collier's Crusade*, 145; Donald Parman, "The Indian and the Civilian Conservation Corps," in Norris Hundley, ed., *The American Indian: Essays from the Pacific Historical Review* (Santa Barbara), 128.

⁸⁹ Washburn, *The American Indian and the United States*, 2213.

ed., *The American Indian: Essays from the Pacific Historical Review* (Santa Barbara, 1974), 128.

but Congress pared this down to \$2.5 million.⁹⁰ Of the various federal aid programs which the Stockbridge-Munsee took advantage of during their first decade of reorganization, only the revolving trust fund was mandated by stipulations of the IRA.

To gain access to the revolving fund, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community adopted a corporate charter on May 21, 1938, by a vote of 94 to 0. The charter's stated purpose was to "further the economic development of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community by conferring certain corporate rights, powers, privileges and immunities." The Stockbridge-Munsee Community became a "body politic and corporate of the United States of America." Membership was limited to enrollment in the Community. All funds flowed from the Interior Department to the Tribal Council, which was given management powers to disperse the money to individuals.⁹¹ The Council established a Community Credit Committee to issue the loans and seek reimbursement.

The Credit Committee also dispensed monies from various grants given to the Community in its early years of tribal reorganization. The purpose of the grants, according to the order of President Franklin Roosevelt extending Emergency Relief Funds to the Native Americans (January 11, 1936), was to create self-help projects to assist in the rehabilitation of the Indians "in stricken, rural, agricultural areas."⁹² These rehabilitation grants were extensive. In a period of two and a half years, a total of \$27,515 was given to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community.⁹³

Most of the loans and grants issued by the Credit Committee were for agricultural

purposes and to maintain existing homes. The Community instituted a pay-as-you-go system, and required individuals to pay for plowing services and such essentials as seeds, onion sets, and berry plants. Loans for agricultural purposes rarely exceeded six dollars, since farming was on small plots and of the subsistence variety.⁹⁴ Nor was tribal land very productive. In 1938 alone, seventy-three white-owned farms were foreclosed in Shawano County—and those farms were on land of much higher quality than that of the Stockbridge-Munsee.⁹⁵

Funds for housing were in even greater demand. John Collier recognized new homes as one of the tribe's "crying needs." He expected funds from what he called the "Hopkins Organization" to eventually build new homes; but everyone recognized that in order to affect immediate relocation onto the reservation, the structures that survived from logging days would have to do.⁹⁶ While these buildings were far better than the chicken coops that some tribal members had been reduced to living in before reorganization, just a few adequate structures existed, enough for only the first families.⁹⁷ Tomah Superintendent Farver proved his mettle by landing a large Works Project Administration (WPA) project for the new Community. In just four years, WPA expended over \$80,000 for the construction of over twenty homes and the refurbishing of existing structures. Farver asserted that WPA funds were crucial, "because of the limited amount of money which the Indian Service has been able to secure."⁹⁸

⁹⁰ Loans, General Files, SMHL.

⁹¹ "Stockbridge-Munsee: Report on I.R.A. and Resettlement Lands," March 6, 1939, 360/Land Acquisition, General, Stockbridge Reservation, BIA, GLA, p. 3.

⁹² John Collier to Frank Christy, August 2, 1935, 360/Land Acquisition, General, Stockbridge Reservation, BIA, GLA.

⁹³ *Project Proposal for Stockbridge Indian Project*, p. 3, SMHL; interview with Bernice Miller Pigeon, Stockbridge-Munsee Community, Wisconsin, July 7, 1982.

⁹⁴ Peru Farver to Mark Muth (District Director of WPA in

⁹⁰ U.S. Department of Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, "Indians at Work" (June, 1939), 6–8.

⁹¹ "Corporate Charter," General Files, p. 1, SMHL.

⁹² Franklin Roosevelt to Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Letter no. 1323, January 11, 1936, Arvid E. Miller, Sr. Papers, 1934–1939, SMHL.

⁹³ Peru Farver to Arvid Miller, March 16, 1940, Arvid E. Miller, Sr. Papers, 1934–1939, SMHL.

WPA funds also helped provide paid work for members of the Community, but the major employer during the first decade of reorganization was the Emergency Conservation Work, better known as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). By building roads, cutting brush, laying telephone lines, constructing buildings, and repairing existing facilities, the Stockbridge-Munsee men who worked for the CCC earned much-needed cash. Their work improved the general condition of the reservation and increased its value. Probably it also conferred a sense of pride and accomplishment on those who participated. The impact of the CCC cannot be overemphasized.

LIKE most of the relief programs that assisted the Stockbridge-Munsee, the Civilian Conservation Corps did not initially specify operations involving Indians; it took the efforts of John Collier, working with Henry Wallace, to expand the Corps to include the first Americans.⁹⁹ Besides providing temporary relief, and in keeping with his notion of cooperative communities, Collier envisioned the CCC as a vehicle to test his thesis that reservations were excellent places to conduct experiments on erosion prevention, subsistence farming, and the development of community living.¹⁰⁰ The combined forces of the Agriculture and Interior departments proved successful. Congress authorized the introduction of CCC projects on Indian reservations in April of 1933 and ordered

an expenditure of \$5,875,000 on seventy-two camps within thirty-three reservations.¹⁰¹

Modifications within the CCC were necessary because Native Americans were less willing to roam about the country than were the general enrollees. For Indians, age was not restricted to the eighteen-to-twenty-five-year range, although physical fitness was still mandatory. Nor were Indians required to sign up for a fixed period of time, and they were allowed to return home if necessary. Because many Indians were able to live at home and still work for the CCC-ID, their net earnings were higher. These modifications encouraged the Native Americans to stay at home and develop their reservations.¹⁰²

Carl Miller's initial request through the Tomah Agency for CCC project work was rejected because tribal lands remained under the Agriculture Department's control. Tomah Superintendent Christy explained to Miller that he could not request CCC projects on lands over which the Department had no jurisdiction.¹⁰³ When the lands finally passed back to the Interior Department in January of 1937, Christy immediately secured a CCC project for the Stockbridge-Munsee Reservation. About 160 Stockbridge-Munsee men were eligible for work. The actual number of those participating in CCC work force at any one time was about forty-five. The age of the workers ranged anywhere from seventeen to sixty-three, with the majority of men in their thirties.¹⁰⁴

Green Bay), October 28, 1937, Tomah Agency Decimal File, Box 1, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1937-1938, NA, GL RG 75; Farver to Xavier Vigeant (Director of Rural Rehabilitation), September 8, 1939, Tomah Agency Decimal File, Box 3, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1939-1940, NA, GL RG 75.

⁹⁹ Philp, *Collier's Crusade*, 187.

¹⁰⁰ Perry H. Merrill, *Roosevelt's Forest Army: A History of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942* (Montpelier, Vermont, 1981), 12.

¹⁰¹ Calvin W. Gower, "The C.C.C. Indian Division: Aid for Depressed Americans, 1933-1942," in *Minnesota History*, 43:6 (Spring, 1972).

¹⁰² U.S. Department of Interior, Civilian Conservation Corps, *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, for the Fiscal Year Ended 30 June 1939*, pp. 25-26; John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, 1967), 33.

¹⁰³ Frank Christy to Carl Miller, May 13, 1936, Land Acquisition, General, Stockbridge Reservation, BIA, GLA.

¹⁰⁴ General File, "C.C.C.-I.D.," SMHL; Gower, "The C.C.C. Indian Division," 6.



Kenneth Abert and family.

The CCC-ID proved a mixed blessing to the Stockbridge-Munsee. The work provided food and shelter, some cash for needy families, and general improvement of the land. But organization of CCC-ID work in the Community was not controlled by the Tribal Council. While the intent of the CCC-ID was to allow tribal councils a degree of control over the selection and planning of work projects, in the case of the

Stockbridge-Munsee actual control rested with the foreman, Kenneth Abert. Abert, a Menominee and member of the Army Reserve, ran the operation like a military post and treated Council plans and ideas for projects with condescension. His overbearing presence was a constant reminder to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community that they were still subject to rules, regulations, and supervision outside of their tribal coun-

cil.¹⁰⁵ The CCC-ID was no doubt a great help in settling the reservation, but Abert's strict control and abrasive manner tempered much of the appreciation with the feeling that they were on the public dole. "[T]he Indian men," Carl Miller observed, "were given work with wages barely enough for their families to exist upon and they were always made to understand that they were *Relief Clients*."¹⁰⁶

The Community recognized that the CCC-ID relief project, controlled as it was by an outsider who had insulted the dignity of their leaders, was almost their sole source of income. Without it, tribal members would have had to seek work elsewhere, possibly jeopardizing the future of a community struggling to find itself. The costs and benefits of such a system—which promoted work, yet guaranteed no future—presented a paradox; for while the Council continued to oppose the operation of the CCC-ID because of its lack of control, it also supported the CCC-ID's continuation when Congress threatened it with termination.

John Collier recognized that the end of the Civilian Conservation Corps would create a vacuum. He asked: "After the depression is over and the emergency grants cease, what will happen to the now-working Indian?"¹⁰⁷ Originally the CCC, which began in April, 1933, was destined to cease operations on June 30, 1940 (50 Stat. 319). On August 7, 1939, President Roosevelt approved congressional requests for an ex-

tension of the CCC to July 1, 1943.¹⁰⁸ Despite Roosevelt's three-year reprieve, however, the Corps could not survive competition from the new danger the United States was about to confront in the Pacific. Two months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribal Council sent a letter to Commissioner Collier expressing their anxiety over the possible loss of CCC funds. "Our community is solely dependent upon CCC-ID employment for an existence," it read, and went on to describe the size of their reservation not in physical terms of acreage, timber, or minerals, but in the human element: "We have 50 families here starting new homes, average age of families past 40 years, average family 5 each. These families trying desperately to get new start in life. Should withdrawal of C.C.C.-I.D. activities be permitted, it would take the life blood from our community, leaving us with unfinished cabins, bare rooms and empty cupboards."¹⁰⁹

Then came the war. By January of 1942, most young Stockbridge-Munsee men had already left the reservation for the armed forces. Despite the depletion of their most able workers, the Tribal Council had many middle-aged men pulling a monthly salary from CCC-ID work and was adamant that the camp remain. In tune with the times, the Council used patriotic phrases as it tried to drum up allies to keep the work alive.¹¹⁰ The Community stressed that a vital part of the war effort must be the protection of the nation's valuable timber reserves in Wisconsin. In an address to the Shawano County board of supervisors, Carl Miller warned that during a time of war—

¹⁰⁵ Gower, in "The C.C.C. Indian Division," argues (p. 4) that the CCC-ID did more to encourage Indian self-administration than frustrate it. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942*, also lauds the CCC for allowing participation of tribal councils in preparing work plans (p. 33). The Stockbridge-Munsee clash with Kenneth Abert suggests that a reappraisal of the value of CCC-ID projects for encouraging self-rule among participating Indians might be in order.

¹⁰⁶ "Our Plan," Carlton Leo Miller Papers, SMHL.

¹⁰⁷ S. Lyman Tyler, *Indian Affairs: A Study of the Changes in Policy of The United States Toward Indians* (Provo, Utah, 1964), 77.

¹⁰⁸ "C.C.C.-I.D. Circular," December 1, 1939, General Files, CCC-ID, SMHL.

¹⁰⁹ "Night Letter: Tribal Council to John Collier," September 9, 1941, General Files, CCC-ID, SMHL.

¹¹⁰ Tribal Council to Robert La Follette, Jr., January 8, 1942, General Files, CCC-ID. See also Assistant Secretary William Zimmerman's correspondence with Senator La Follette, September 22, 1941, General Files, CCC-ID, SMHL.

total war—the enemy might start numerous small fires which, if uncontrolled, could develop into a “gigantic, rolling, leaping conflagration such as no man has ever seen and no human power could stop.”¹¹¹

Despite these rhetorical flourishes and other efforts, the CCC-ID camp at the Stockbridge-Munsee Community closed on June 30, 1942.¹¹² Kenneth Abert left for the army and Carl Miller took over as a fire guard. Try as they might, the Tribal Council could not convince the powers that be in Washington that the residents of the Stockbridge-Munsee reservation were an integral part of the national defense. The CCC-ID did succeed in providing many of the young men of the tribe a chance to master a trade, and it improved living standards on the reservation. Yet the security it offered was short-lived, and when it closed down there was again no source of employment. World War II served to re-emphasize the lack of jobs in the area. Many young members of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community donned uniforms and took their places on battlefields. Others found work on assembly lines in Sturgeon Bay, Green Bay, Milwaukee, Wausau, or even Seattle—but not on the reservation.¹¹³ The elders remained at home to keep alive the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, which was now a corporation without a work force, a tribal council with few to govern.

THE tribal reorganization of the Stockbridge-Munsee was the result of four vital forces working together. John Collier and his agents surely played a

large role, overseeing the land acquisition and filing requests for money to fund the various projects that were vital to the Community’s early survival. The evidence also suggests that were it not for the political acumen of the tribal leadership, most notably Carl Miller and members of the Business Committee, the single most propitious moment for reorganization presented by the Indian Reorganization Act would have slipped by. The Stockbridge-Munsee people were not “lucky” that they were given, in Carl Miller’s words, “another chance.” Luck in this instance was simply experience meeting opportunity.

The third factor was one of supreme irony. Only by having their former forests stripped bare—in some cases contributing to the ecological disaster by hiring themselves out as loggers on their old tribal lands—could the Stockbridge-Munsee have qualified for funds under FERA’s submarginal land program. That this was the only acquisition program available after IRA money was depleted made the environmental debacle doubly ironic. Once the Stockbridge-Munsee began to move “way back into the brush,” they were able to take advantage of other New Deal relief programs such as the Works Progress Administration, Rural Rehabilitation, and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The fact that such resources were available as a result of and during one of the most severe economic crises in American history is the fourth and final factor in the creation of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. It is fair to wonder whether, without the Great Depression acting as impetus for the creation of Roosevelt’s alphabet agencies, the Community would have reorganized at all. For good leadership, be it Carl Miller’s or John Collier’s, could go only so far without adequate resources to fulfill the promises made to the people who call themselves Muh-He-Con-Neew.

¹¹¹ Carl Miller to Shawano County Board of Supervisors (no date), General Files, CCC-ID, SMHL.

¹¹² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, green notebook, Carlton Leo Miller Papers, SMHL.

¹¹³ Interview with Lucille Bowman Miller, Stockbridge-Munsee Community, Wisconsin, August 27, 1983.