Adapting Through Time

The Indigenous Peoples of the Detroit River Region

For thousands of years, the Detroit River and surrounding lands have been home to the Anishnaabek people who include the Odawa/Ottawa, Chippewa/Ojibway and Bodewadomi/Potawatomi. This area was an important village site, ideally located for fishing, travel and trade, and helped shape culture and identity in the region.



Enduring Persistent Conflict

The arrival of Europeans in the 17th century brought disease and warfare to the area. Detroit became a center of conflict for the Anishnaabek people and their tribal allies, who fought against the British in Pontiac's War in 1763 and against the Americans in the War of 1812.



Securing a Future

Following the War of 1812, the Anishnaabek signed treaties to reserve rights, lands and access to natural resources. In 1855, many bands of Odawa and Ojibway people signed treaties with the US to permanently stay in Michigan.

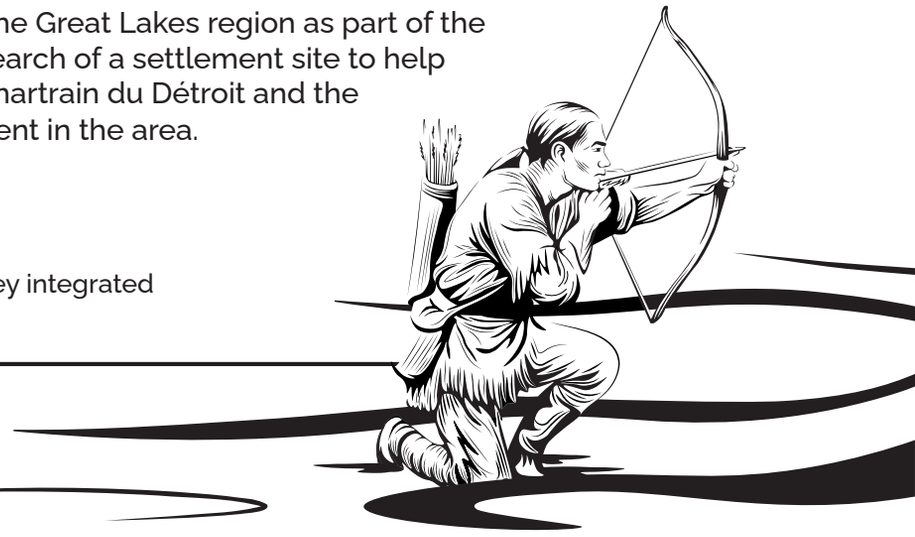
A Continued Legacy

Today, Michigan is home to 12 Federally Recognized Tribes of Anishnaabek people. They share the Detroit area with numerous other tribal nations, many of whom arrived in the 20th century to work and create communities. Tens of thousands of self-identified Indigenous people live in the Metro Detroit area.

The Earliest European Settlers

The Francophone Community of the Detroit River Area

In 1701, Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac led 100 French soldiers to the Great Lakes region as part of the expansion of the *Pays d'en Haut* (French territory). They were in search of a settlement site to help protect French interests in the fur trade. Cadillac built Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit and the Ste. Anne de Détroit chapel, establishing the first French settlement in the area.



A Strong Indigenous Presence

Indigenous groups lived in the region long before the French arrived. They integrated the French newcomers into their trade networks and political alliances.



From Fur Trading to Farming

As the area developed, more French settlers arrived and were allocated "ribbon farms," long skinny tracts of land leading up from the river. Their shape ensured each farm had water access, fostering river trade and self-sufficiency.

French Roots

Many modern-day streets in Detroit, including Beaubien, Dequindre and Livernois, are named after the owners of ribbon farms that existed during this time.

A Clash of Empires

Detroit became a key military site in the tumultuous years ahead, with the area shifting from French to British hands and then ultimately to American rule after the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution.



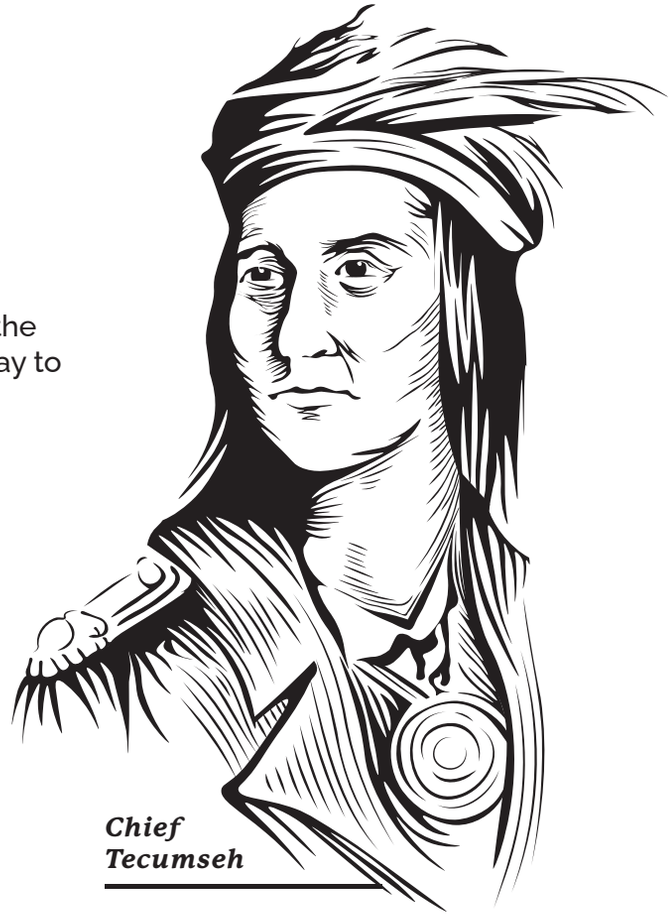
The Battle of Detroit

Indigenous Alliances and Securing Access to the North

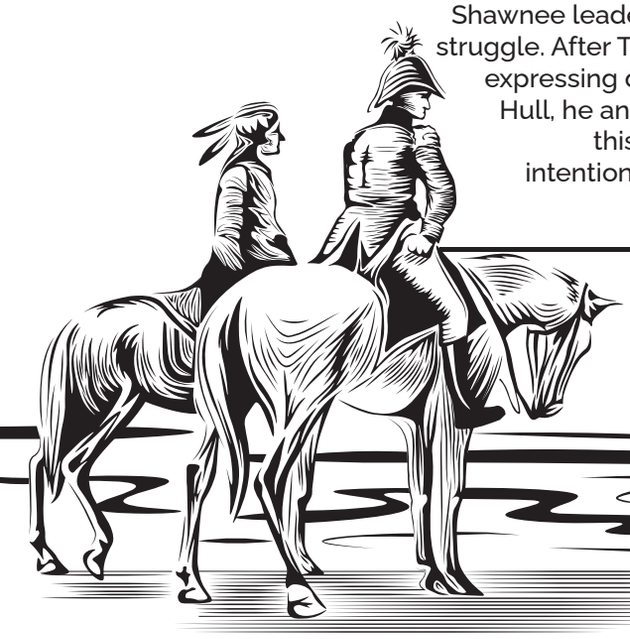
In 1812, tensions between the US and Britain were high, as both sought control of the profitable fur trade and the Northwest Territory. The Detroit River was a key gateway to the North, making the Battle of Detroit a critical event in the War of 1812.

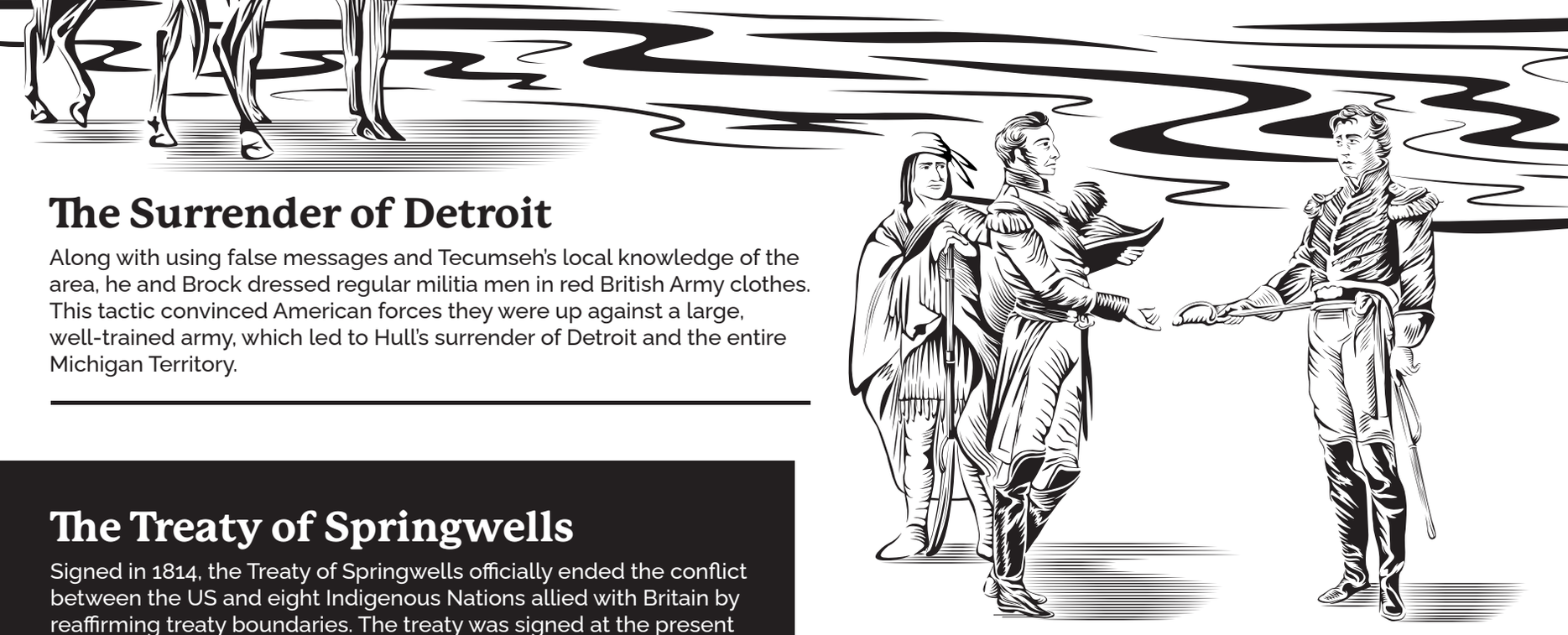
Indigenous Alliances with Britain

Shawnee leader Chief Tecumseh was instrumental in this struggle. After Tecumseh intercepted American messages expressing displeasure in their leader, General William Hull, he and his British ally, General Isaac Brock, used this information to craft false messages. They intentionally allowed these deceptive messages to be intercepted by the Americans.



Chief Tecumseh





The Surrender of Detroit

Along with using false messages and Tecumseh's local knowledge of the area, he and Brock dressed regular militia men in red British Army clothes. This tactic convinced American forces they were up against a large, well-trained army, which led to Hull's surrender of Detroit and the entire Michigan Territory.

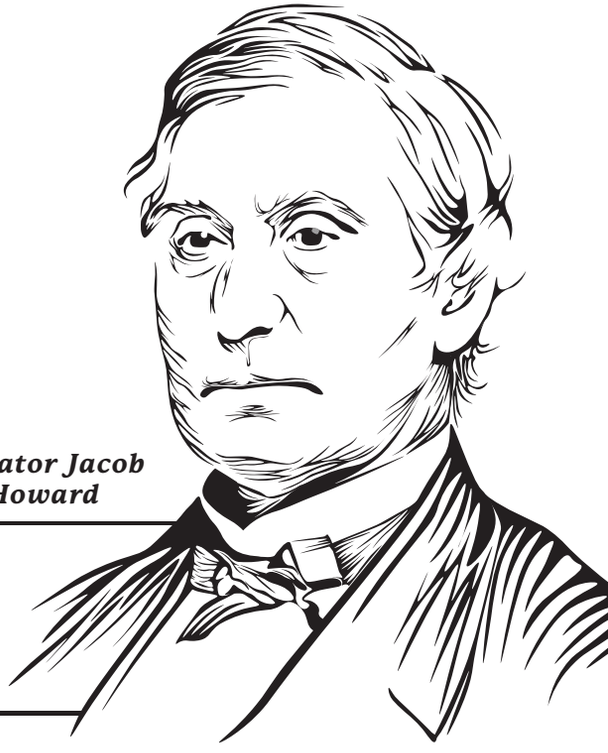
The Treaty of Springwells

Signed in 1814, the Treaty of Springwells officially ended the conflict between the US and eight Indigenous Nations allied with Britain by reaffirming treaty boundaries. The treaty was signed at the present site of Historic Fort Wayne, which you can still visit today.

The True Meaning of Liberty

Senator Jacob M. Howard's Legacy

The Detroit River region has been a site where fundamental issues of race, mobility, slavery and freedom have been shaped.



Senator Jacob M. Howard

Remembering the Champions of Freedom

It is easy to take for granted the 13th Amendment, passed in 1865, that ended slavery in the US, but the tireless labor of those who fought for emancipation is to be remembered. Senator Jacob M. Howard from Detroit was a strong anti-slavery organizer and politician in the 1800s.



The Beginning of the End of Slavery

Howard, an attorney, a Member of the Michigan House of Representatives and later a Michigan Senator, became disappointed with the conservative Whig Party he had identified with, feeling they did not take a strong enough anti-slavery stance. He was instrumental in planning the first conference about slavery in Jackson, Michigan in 1854, where diverse groups came together to speak about the issue. For him and his peers, this represented "the beginning of the end of slavery."



Standing Together to Protect the Marginalized

Many of Howard's peers were skeptical about the political risk of ending slavery. To them, Howard responded:

> ***"Now is the time. None can be more propitious. The people are with us, and if we give them a chance they will demolish slavery at a blow. Let us try!"***

His legacy is a reminder that acting together in the name of freedom and liberation for those most marginalized is always worth the risk.

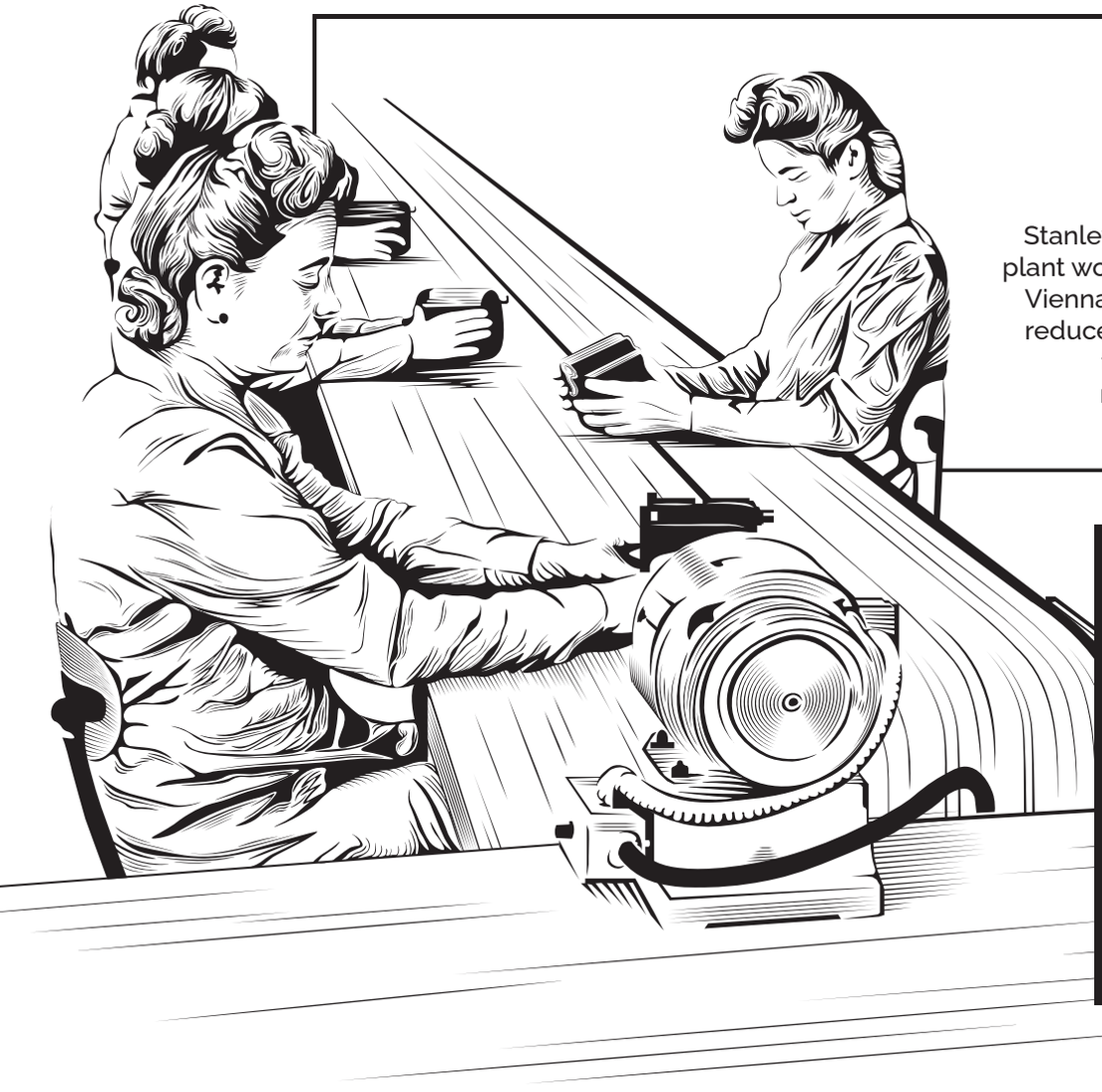
The Power of Peaceful Disruption

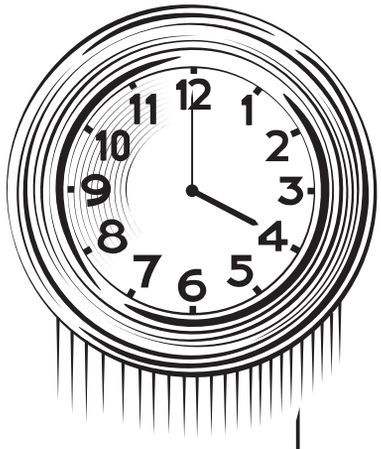
Ternstedt Auto Workers and a Unique Form of Protest

In the early 1900s, when the automotive industry workforce was predominantly male, the Ternstedt Manufacturing Company began hiring women for their dexterity in handling small parts. By 1930, women—many of them immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe—made up about half of the company's workforce. However, they faced poor treatment and harsh working conditions.

Struggles for Fair Treatment

Ternstedt plant workers faced low wages, unsafe conditions and widespread discrimination. Inspired by the 1936–37 Flint Sit-Down Strike, they began organizing for better treatment in spring 1937. However, their efforts were challenged by a no-strike clause that limited their ability to take action.





A Creative Solution

Stanley Nowak, a young union organizer assisting the plant workers, recalled a story of a "slowdown" strike in Vienna, where employees stayed at their stations but reduced productivity. Ternstedt workers adopted this tactic, successfully pressuring management to recognize their union, raise wages and address gender-based favoritism and harassment.

Support from the Slavic Community

Nowak leveraged his ties to the local Slavic community to rally support for Ternstedt workers. Meetings were often held at Martin Hall, a Ukrainian-owned venue with a large Polish presence near Michigan Avenue, and at Slovene Hall, located at Livernois and South Streets—now the site of the Gordie Howe International Bridge US Port of Entry.

Standing Up Against Discrimination

The Story of Sarah Elizabeth Ray

Bois Blanc, commonly known as Bob-Lo Island, lies 12 miles (19 kilometers) south of the Gordie Howe International Bridge. It was once home to the Bob-Lo Island Amusement Park, serviced by the SS *Columbia* and SS *Ste. Clair*. It was also the site of a pivotal civil rights battle that helped shape history.

A Celebration Cut Short

On June 21, 1945, a 24-year-old Black woman named Sarah Elizabeth Ray boarded the SS *Columbia* to travel to Bob-Lo Island Amusement Park. She and her classmates were celebrating their graduation from secretarial school. When she presented her ticket, she was asked to disembark because of her race. Instead of quietly accepting a refund, she headed to the local NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) for legal counsel.



An Important Civil Rights Case

The Michigan Civil Rights Act banned racial discrimination on public transport, and courts consistently ruled in Ray's favor. However, the Bob-Lo Excursion Company appealed repeatedly, taking the case to the Supreme Court in 1948, which also sided with Ray. Her case, and others like it, helped pave the way for subsequent civil rights cases.

Sarah Elizabeth Ray

The Action House

Following the Detroit Riot in 1967, Ray started a community center in East Detroit called the Action House. The Action House provided a safe space for Black youth and encouraged interracial harmony by offering counseling, education, recreational activities and free meals.

Motor City Music

Get With the Rhythm...

Celebrated as the hometown of Motown Records and the birthplace of techno, Detroit has a rich and diverse musical history. Some of the world's most famous artists were born in Detroit and have contributed to a variety of music genres including soul, rock, electronic, punk, rap and hip-hop.

Building a Detroit Artists Playlist

Take an opportunity while you're crossing the Gordie Howe International Bridge to listen to music by these famous Detroit artists.

- Alice Cooper
- Anita Baker
- Aretha Franklin
- BeBe & CeCe Winans
- Big Sean
- Bob Seger
- Derrick May
- Diana Ross
- Eminem
- Greta Van Fleet
- Iggy Pop
- Insane Clown Posse
- J Dilla
- Juan Atkins
- Kenny Burrell
- Kevin Saunderson
- Kid Rock
- Lizzo
- Marvin Gaye
- MC5
- Smokey Robinson & The Miracles
- Stevie Wonder
- Suzi Quatro
- Ted Nugent
- The Four Tops
- The Stooges
- The Supremes
- The Temptations
- The White Stripes
- Was (Not Was)



From the Neighborhood – Jack White

Jack White's childhood home is in the Mexicantown neighborhood of Southwest Detroit, a few blocks from the Gordie Howe International Bridge. This 12-time Grammy winner started the garage band duo, The White Stripes, in 1997 after a three-year upholstery apprenticeship. White is renowned for his distinctive sound and guitar skills, twice appearing on the *Rolling Stone* list of greatest guitarists of all time. His preference for analog technology and recording techniques led to him co-founding the independent record label Third Man Records, which has a significant presence in Detroit.

The Fox Theatre

Designated a National Historic Landmark, the Fox Theatre opened in 1928 as the flagship movie palace for the Fox Theatre chain. An iconic part of downtown Detroit, it is now the largest surviving Fox Theatre, serving as a venue for hometown and visiting artists.