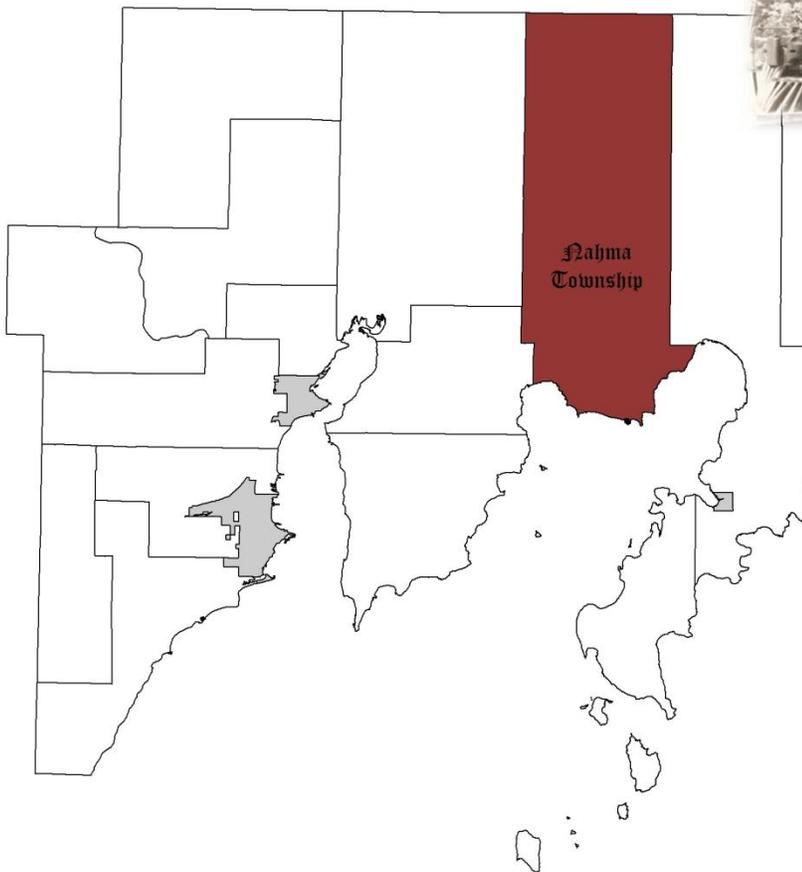


# *Nahma Township Historical Society*

A timeline of Historical Events in Nahma Township

Developed December 2010



*Sawyer Lumber Co. Saw Mill, Nahma, Mich.*

## **Photo credits:**

Nahma Township Historical Society  
Glenn Lamberg  
Christine Groleau  
Wayne LaVigne  
Carl Johnson

# Nahma Township Historical Time Line

From: 2010 Nahma Township Recreation Plan

The first recorded information of European settlers in what is now Nahma was about 1848. Prior to this period and after this date, the Native Americans or Anishinabeg (Ojibwa for original people) hunted, fished and carried out their life activities in this area. A 1952 document by Cornelius Sochay titled "Nahma Indians" relays an oral history handed down to Cornelius from others. This document can be found at end of this historic timeline.

These early Anishinabeg people were Ojibwa (English version is Chippewa). Evidence of pre-European activities by the Anishinabeg people can be found throughout Nahma Township and the surrounding areas.

Because of the presence of the Sturgeon in the river that runs through Nahma Township and outlets in Big Bay de Noc at Nahma, the Ojibwa name of Na'me was given to the area. The pronouncing of the Ojibwa name would be Na'may but the English pronunciation is Na'mah. Today Sturgeon still exists in Big Bay de Noc, suggesting the possibility that populations of Sturgeon could be reestablished in the river.



### **Time line of historical details:**

- In 1848, a water-powered saw mill was built on the Sturgeon River upstream of the locally named Half Mile Bridge. As of 2010, portions of the old dam can be still seen upstream from the bridge. This was the first documented sawmill located in the Nahma area. It was built and owned by George Richards and S.H. Kerfoot. This area may have been the area referred to as the Delta Mills in documented Delta County history notes.
- In 1851, the above mill was sold to Thomas Holbrook and Timothy Wright who operated the mill in this location until 1859.
- The town and mill were established as early as 1856, when it gained its first post office.
- Delta County was formally organized in 1861. The first meeting of the Delta County Board of Supervisors was held May 28, 1862, at the Delta Mills in the Township of Nahma. Nahma Township was the first township created in Delta County in 1861.

Loggers getting a warm midday meal



(Delta County records). Nahma Township's valuation was \$74,950 and Escanaba's was \$56,263 at this time. (It appears from writings that the original 2 townships in Delta County were Nahma Township and Escanaba Township. Later townships in Delta County came from adding townships from lands originally in Nahma and Escanaba Townships.)

- In the year 1863, 16 freeholders made application to the County Board to form Garden Township. Ten geographic townships, each 6 miles square, were given to Garden. Before that, Nahma Township was four times larger than it is today.
- Documentation points out that a portion of Ensign Township came from the western side of the original Nahma Township.
- Early transportation was by water and mostly sailboats. When the bays were frozen, teams with sleighs were used.
- In 1868 the County Road was ordered to be built through Nahma; it was finished in a year. The following year, the Mackinac-State County Highway was built through Nahma Township. It ran parallel to where the Soo Line is now and was a narrow road to accommodate wagons. There were also Indian trails built from the North.
- Bay de Nocquet Company was founded in 1881. The company owned 200,000 acres of land from Nahma to within 7 miles of Lake Superior. The mill started sawing in 1882. It operated until April 15, 1899, when it was destroyed by fire. A new mill was purchased and moved to the town of Nahma. In its heyday it employed 1200 men.



- St. Lawrence Catholic Church was a mission church built in 1882 by the Anishinabeg residents of the area. Lumber was donated to the project by the Bay de Nocquet Company. The remains of the church were removed from the site in 2009. The church history is very important to many in Nahma Township residents and their families.
- St. James Catholic church was north of St. Jacques and the old US-2. The church was located south of the railroad grade. Services, for those that remember, were once per month and the priest serving the area came in by train from as far away as Sault Ste. Marie. This church served the white (non-Anishinabeg) community for years.

There was also a cemetery located close to this church. Photos and written history of this church were not available at the time of this printing.



- The recreational experiences for residents and visitors to Nahma during the “heyday” of the community were great. There were facilities in the club house ( 97 ft. x 143 ft.) for basketball, bowling, a social gathering area, candy kitchen/soda fountain, barber shop, library, bar, lounges and other amenities. Also the Bay de Nocquet Company had a golf course, public beach, tennis courts, baseball fields, both wooden and later concrete sidewalks, signage for trails and

abundant hunting opportunities on their large land holdings.

- St. Andrew’s Catholic Church was built in 1907. Prior to that, services were held at the school building.
- In 1906, construction began on what is now known as the Bethany Lutheran Church in Isabella. The construction was completed in 1912. The original articles of association of the Swedish Evangelical Bethania Congregation were signed by the congregation May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1905. At that time, and for the next twenty years, Swedish was the main language in the life of this congregation
- In 1911, the Grange Hall in Isabella was constructed to serve the agricultural community. This hall is presently the Isabella Community Hall.
- On October 6, 1923 the power plant, post office, round house, warehouse, general store, boardinghouse, office of



In Nahma’s heyday there were facilities only found in larger towns, such as a hospital, boarding houses, full service grocery store with fuel supplies, wooden sidewalks, tennis courts, public swimming beach and a public K-12 school to name the major amenities.

the lumber company, the brand new community house, and a score of smaller buildings were destroyed by fire.

- A new mill was built in 1923 and operated until July 26, 1951 when it closed due to lack of timber resources.

- The company railroad, the Nahma and Northern, operated the last train run in 1948. At one time the railroad had 75 miles of track.
- From 1933-1935 the Bay de Nocquet Company sold 100,000 acres of land to the USFS for inclusion in the Hiawatha National Forest. It also sold 20,000 acres to Mead Corporation and thousands of acres to hunt clubs, private land developers, the Girl Scouts, etc.
- In 1951, the entire town of Nahma was put up for sale at a price of \$250,000. This was featured in Life Magazine.
- With only 4,300 acres of the original land left, the town was purchased in 1951 by American Playground for \$250,000. The intent was to move the existing company from Indiana to Nahma but the plant required more electricity than could be provided locally and only a portion of the mill was moved to Nahma.



**SOLD: ONE TOWN**  
A manufacturer buys Nahma, Mich.  
lock, stock, barrel and railroad

- Sometime during the 1960's, Warren Miller, President of American Playground, sold 1,323 acres of land to the USFS for \$220,000. During the same period, 5 miles of land was sold to the USFS for \$200,000. This land was home to about 25 Native American families. Many families relocated in the Rapid River area.

- In 1968-1969 American Playground moved from Indiana

to Nahma with 60 people making playground equipment.

- In 1971, economic issues plagued American Playground and the plant moved back to Indiana. Nahma remained a parts manufacturer, employing 6 people until November 1987. During this time more land was sold to private individuals.
- In 1988 American Playground was purchased by Randy Coats. Coats saw the potential for the remaining 1,200 acres of Nahma to become a resort town.
- At this time Coats settled a dispute with the MDNR to turn over 8 acres for a public boat landing in exchange for clear title to the property. This put an end to an existing 35 year old dispute over 40 acres of filled Great Lake's bottomlands.
- In 1992 the "resort community" halted and Coats again began selling off parcels of the Nahma Community.
- In 1994, the Groleau Family (Warren, Pat & Ron and spouses) purchased 15 acres of land and formed Nahma, Inc. Property included the Nahma Inn (hotel), general store, the brick office building, school and surrounding land, beach frontage and some land in back of the hotel.



- Today in Nahma very few of the original buildings remain. A few early residents are still living and many residents are descendants of the employees of Bay de Nocquet Company and are still living in Nahma Township. Many of the younger generation have had to move to bigger cities for job opportunities.
- In 1997, Carlton Johnson and John Frost purchased the lumber factory and grounds to build a campground and rental cottages, complete with a camp store. Today the No-Nahma Resort operation has a boat docking area,



conference facilities, cabin rentals, equipment rentals, a beach, a golf course, and many other amenities.

- In 2010, residents and visitors began work on improving the recreational experiences and business climate for Nahma Township. The abundance of national forest land in the Hiawatha National Forest, the great water resources, the abundance of a variety of wildlife, the climate along Lake Michigan and the close social climate provide for great opportunities to enhance the recreational experience to the level once present in Nahma Township. The beginning of these efforts was put together in the Nahma Township Recreation Plan.

In the survey process the history of Nahma and the importance of the historical aspects were noted by residents and especially visitors as a very strong reason for recreating/visiting the Nahma Township area. The preservation of the remaining historic buildings and structures is essential to the recreation experience in Nahma Township. Nahma Township is steeped in early history.

***In an effort to maintain the significance of the historical role, the Nahma Township Recreation Committee is recommending:***

- The signage used by the Bay De Nocquet Company will be utilized in the recreational signage program of future work in Nahma Township.
- The role of the logging, water, transportation and recreation will be brought into play in many of the future recreational opportunities. This includes utilizing the old railroad grades for walkways, noting the historic sites in the bay good for observing by snorkeling and diving, and identification of sites along the Sturgeon River that were used for logging operations and transportation, for the canoeist and kayaking enthusiast to enjoy.
- Identification of historic sites and protecting their historic and cultural values. This includes Sandtown, the first mill site, cemetery areas, and other sites found throughout the township.
- Supporting all efforts of the Nahma Township Historical Society in their work to improve facilities, promote the township's history through publications, internet activities, financial advancements and identification and protection of sites.
- Support the Nahma Township Historical Society in their efforts to preserve and improve their museum facility.

Because of this, many visitors come yearly to learn about the history of this small town. The quaint community of Nahma was the headquarters of the Bay de Nocquet Company. The wide boulevards, flower carts, nicely mowed areas and historic buildings create a pleasing ambiance to visitors and residents. The need to maintain the historic appearance and support the work of keeping up the clean appearance of the community is necessary for future recreation.



In the center of town is the Nahma Township Historical Society. The Nahma Township Historical society building represents the oldest church building in Nahma. The “Little Brown Church” was built in 1904 as St. Paul's Protestant Union Church. As the first church built in Nahma, it began as a non-

denominational church for the people of the community. In 1951, when the town was put up for sale, the “Little Brown Church” was deeded to the Episcopal Diocese of Marquette. The final services were held on June 4th, 2000. The Nahma Township Historical Society worked with the Episcopal Bishop; the Diocese deeded the building



There are over 75 miles of old railroad grade left in Nahma Township attesting to the effort needed to bring the logs from the sawyer to the sawmill at Nahma.

to Nahma Township for a museum in 2004.



The Museum houses many old articles, old records of the Bay de Nocquet Company that assists people in learning more about the rich history of the area, as well as genealogy work to help families learn more of their ancestors.

The Historical Society is supported by its membership, fund raisers, and donations. The membership has been responsible for heading up the renovation of the old steam engine and currently working on saving the Bay de Nocquet

Company's old burner. This burner has been a notable icon of Nahma.



This photo circa 1950 shows the expansiveness of the sawmill operation in Nahma. This photo along with other historic photos is available through the Nahma Township Historical Society.

The Nahma Township Historical Society Board includes:

Ruth Ann Ritter-President  
Tee Lynts-Secretary  
Dani Groleau-Member  
Pat Bingham-Member

Contact Tee Lynts, Secretary at (906) 644-2758 on:

- Museum Hours
- Becoming a member & meeting times
- Purchasing photos
- Purchasing shirts, etc. of Nahma Township
- Volunteering to help the society

## Nahma Indians

**Story as told by Cornelius Sochay**

**Dated: September 7, 1952**

The Nahma Indians settled in Nahma sometime before 1848. The exact date is not known. Before coming to Nahma the Indians came originally from Beaver Island, Sugar Island and several other islands in Lake Michigan.

The Indians lived on these islands until the hunting and fishing were on downgrade. About a dozen or so of the men ventured out on birch bark canoes and headed straight for the Garden Peninsula. They explored the region and found it to be well inhabited with game and the waters contained a good abundance of fish. So these men journeyed back to the islands and reported this. After conferring with the rest of the tribe, they started the log trip over water (some forty miles or so.) With good luck they all made it safely to the Garden Peninsula. They settled there for some odd years. While on a hunting trip, the men came as far as Indian Point and discovered it a much better place to live. The many stones there offered an excellent place to make arrow heads for their arrows. There was a lack of flint around here so the Indians used stones that would split evenly. So they came from the Garden Peninsula and settled on Indian Point.

In settling a region, usually the men went ahead. They carried a small pack sack on their back. These packs contained some food and water and more arrows. On these pack sacks were different designs so the women could tell which ones belonged to their husbands. The men would hang these pack sacks on a tree where the tepee was to be, and they would then go hunting. When they returned at night the camp was already up. The women carried all the camping equipment such as; Birch Bark which covered the tepees or this was sometimes skins. Whatever belongings they had were handled by the women. The pottery they had was made

out of clay and then baked in the sun. This is one of the oldest Indian Customs. The main job for the man of the house was to keep the village supplied with meat and fish. The rest of the work was up to the women.

When evening came along the Indian had very little light in the tepee. All the light he had was from the fire in the middle of the tepee. The smoke escaped through a hole which was located in the peak of the tepee.

The Indians did a lot of trapping during the summer as well as in the winter. Trading the furs for some material and cooking utensils and some knives of some sort, but they did most of their trapping in the winter and sold their hides in the spring. They would go to Mackinac Island to the trading post there and trade their furs for what things they needed. They travelled by canoe or they would walk the distance depending upon the weather.

It was always up to the man to teach the young boy the art of handling a bow and arrow. He also taught the boy how to trap and how to stalk game. The boy had to learn how to care of himself in the woods. While on the other hand, the women taught the girls how to put up a tepee, how to smoke meat and fish and how to preserve berries. The berries were set on bark and then set out in the sun to dry. This would take all of the water out of them. When they were ready to cook the berries, they would soak them in water first. The water would swell up the berries and they would look as though they were just freshly picked.

The Indians that settled here sort of broke up into two tribes, those that settled near the shore and those who lived farther inland. The Indians who live next to the shore would do a lot of fishing and trade with the Indians in the woods for the meat they had in stock. This would make it easier for the people to get their food.

If anyone were sick, he was taken to the Medicine Man and he would observe the person for several days and give him medicine made out of herbs and different roots of trees.

The Nahma Indians never had many enemies. They were more of a friendly nature, although they did have several encounters with the Mohawk Indians who lived in the Green Bay area. They were considered by the Chippewa (which is what the Nahma Indians are) as one of the most savage tribes around here.

The main reason why the Mohawks attacked the Chippewas was a belief they had. It would have to kill someone before the year was up. If he didn't kill anyone, someone in his family would have to die and this sometimes happened. So these Indians went on masquerading parties. They wouldn't just walk into another tribe and slaughter them, but they would give them a fair warning before they attacked. They would never kill everyone in the tribe; they were always kind enough to spare some of the men to keep the rest of the tribe going. One of these battles was fought on Indian Point, somewhere near the gravel pit.

The first Indian Cemetery was located on Indian Point and it is still being used nowadays. If a baby died in those days, he usually wasn't buried in the cemetery. He or she was buried next to the house or tepee and a little hut built over the grave. In the grave or hut was set little bows and arrows and other trinkets so that they could play with these in their next life.

The Indians built the Catholic Church at Indian Point. They received the lumber from the mill which was located somewhere near the Half Mile Bridge. Of course, the Church was built over several times since then.

The Nahma Indians didn't have much recreation. They played a game which is similar to our game called soccer. The Indian had to be skilled with the bow and arrow, so they had many games to test the skills of each hunter.

When the Indians began working with the white man he became more and more educated. He began to learn the ways to make his life easier, so right to the present day; he enjoys the same conveniences that the white man has.

The End

Cornelius Sochay was a 1952 graduate of Nahma High School

This article was retyped: Tom C. Elegreet, 2/6/1997      digitally typed by Glenn Lamberg  
11/04/2010



“Sunset at Indian Point”