

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

The following document is provided by the
LAW AND LEGISLATIVE DIGITAL LIBRARY
at the Maine State Law and Legislative Reference Library
<http://legislature.maine.gov/lawlib>



Reproduced from scanned originals with text recognition applied
(searchable text may contain some errors and/or omissions)

Indians. Name.

STATE LAW LIBRARY
AUGUSTA, MAINE

THE HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AROOSTOOK INDIANS

Part II: July 1971 - December 1972

During the first three years of its history, the A.A.I. found it necessary to develop within the context of Ricker College. Valuable assistance was received from Ricker faculty, in-kind services were donated by the college, and the A.A.I. was able to route its federal programming through the Ricker financial office. The accomplishments of this period are recorded in the "History of the Association of Aroostook Indians" which was published in 1971. The period covered in this report has been a period of growing independence for the A.A.I. and also for expanded programming and influence. At the beginning of this period, the A.A.I. received its first grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity (O.E.O.). This report may also be considered as a progress report and evaluation of that O.E.O. program although it involves many other A.A.I. programs as well.

Goals

The primary goals of the A.A.I., as they have come to be defined over the period of this history, are; to strengthen the Indian community across lines of family group, tribe, territory and class so that it will be better able to respond to the social and economic pressures that constrict it; to develop leadership within the Indian community that can transcend the Indian/white barrier; and to improve the standard of living of the Indian community in Aroostook County. To accomplish these goals the A.A.I. must foster Indian pride and identity, make being Indian more pleasurable and fulfilling, and help develop services to be delivered either by the A.A.I. or by other agencies. At all times the emphasis should be placed on self-determination and self-sufficiency.

The A.A.I. Board, when formed, identified five areas for the Association to develop programs: Housing, education, youth opportunities, employment, and state and federal recognition for Maine's MicMac and Maliseet people. The A.A.I. has made significant strides in each of these areas. Over the years the varried and inter-related nature of the Indian people's problems has become apparent and it has become necessary to explore other program areas, in particular health, welfare, and alcoholism.

Staff Development and Funding

In July of 1971 a one year O.E.O. grant of \$25,000 became available to the Association. This grant has made it possible for the A.A.I. to increase its staff from three to ten by taking advantage of other programs. The A.A.I. received its O.E.O. funds in an unusual way. The grant was drawn from the Alcoholism Program Account whereas the program the A.A.I. had submitted for funding was an alcoholism program only in the broadest sense. The program was entitled the A.A.I. Alcoholism Prevention Program. Prevention was defined as dealing with the underlying socio-economic causes of Indian alcoholism. We believe that striking at the root causes is an essential part of attacking Indian alcoholism. O.E.O. went along with our proposal both because they wished to fund us and because they agreed that these funds could be used most effectively in achieving the program goals if used as local initiative funds.

During this period the staff structure has taken the following form. Mr. Battiste (MICMAC) and Mr. Polchies (MALISEET) have remained on as the core administrators. When the Title I Higher Education Act program ended in December of 1971, Mr. Battiste became an employee of the Department of Indian Affairs under Emergency Employment Act funding; he is assigned to the A.A.I. office which picks up his travel and provides supportive services. Mr. Polchies, who is the President of the A.A.I., became an employee of the American Friends Service Committee when his

Ford Foundation Fellowship ran out; his travel however is covered by a special grant from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland. Gregory Buesing, a non-Indian was hired as Director of the Alcoholism Prevention Program, with major responsibilities in planning and program development. Janice Russell, another non-Indian was hired as youth coordinator, also under O.E.O. funding. Miss Russell was replaced on the staff by Miss Judy Litz in the fall of 1972. Mrs. Brenda Polchies remained as the A.A.I. secretary after the Title I program ran out, being paid then from O.E.O. funds. She left the staff in September of 1972.

In September of 1972 the Alcoholism Prevention Program was discontinued by O.E.O. and refunded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. N.I.A.A.A. required a program more directly aimed at Indian alcoholism. For this reason Mr. Buesing's position was replaced by that of "social worker" which was briefly filled by Mr. Richard LeSieur a non-Indian during the fall of 1972. At the time it appeared that O.E.O. would refund Mr. Buesing's position with a new grant, such a grant was received December 1, 1972. Mrs. Melinda Davis, a non-Indian was hired as secretary-bookkeeper under the N.I.A.A.A. program. The new O.E.O. funding has made the creation of another secretarial position possible.

Shirley Levasseur (MALISEET) Houlton and Helen Ciganik (MICMAC) from Caribou, both A.A.I. members joined VISTA in December of 1971 as community volunteers and were assigned to the A.A.I. to work as outreach workers. These positions have been very important in maintaining close A.A.I. staff contact with the Indian people and in making A.A.I. program staff more effective. The A.A.I. has requested that these positions be refunded and that two additional positions be granted for 1973.

Through the concerted effort of the staff, the A.A.I. was able to get a Pine Tree Attorney assigned to the A.A.I. office on a one day per week basis. Mr. William Simons, a non-Indian, quickly developed a caseload of thirty people. On the basis of our experience with Mr. Simons it became clear that it was necessary to hire a full time attorney for the A.A.I. In November, 1972, the A.A.I. hired Mr. Robert Moore, a non-Indian, to serve as the A.A.I. attorney. This position is funded by the Roman Catholic Campaign for Human Development. Mr. Moore has joined the staff Pine Tree Indian Unit continues to assist the A.A.I.

Finally, there is one other position within the A.A.I. that became open on December 1, 1972 and which has yet to be filled. This is the Dental Hygenist position which will be responsible for carrying out a general program in dental education, preventative, dentistry cleaning, floride treatments, referals, etc. This was funded by the New England Regional Commission and American for Childrens Relief.

A.A.I. Accomplishments: 1971-2

A. Youth Programs. Programs to increase oppourtunities for Indian Youth both through education and other supplemental programs, have always been a major A.A.I. priority. For this reason the A.A.I. hired a youth coordinator in the fall of 1971. Some of the A.A.I. youth programs include:

--Tutorial Program. Since 1969 the A.A.I. has operated a tutorial program, serving approximately 30 Indian children in the Houlton area. Now in its fourth year the tutorial is about to expand to the Presque Isle and Caribou areas. Volunteer help has come in this program from students from Ricker College, and the Houlton High School. Assistance is expected in the near future from students from Caribou High School and the University of Maine at Presque Isle. In the past the tutors have strictly been volunteers. We have now worked out an arrangement with various schools.

to award academic credit to the tutors involved.

-- Summer Camp. For the last two summers the AAI has run a summer camp program in conjunction with the Quebec Labrador Mission Foundation. Each year the A.A.I. has taken increasing control over the direction and running of the program. The camp serves approximately 80 Indian boys and girls from all over Aroostook. This year the A.A.I. also ran a week long camp for 40 non-Indian children. The camp staff was made up of 5 Indians and 5 non-Indians.

-- Foster Care. Statewide there are 137 Indian children in foster care; there are nearly 80 such children in Aroostook County alone. Over 60% of these children are neither with relatives or in Indian foster homes. Because of the severity of this problem, the A.A.I. has encouraged the Indian community across the state to work with the Department of Health and Welfare of Maine to develop a special program to serve these children. This planning is now taking place.

-- Scholarships. During the Special Session of the 105th Legislature of the State of Maine, a scholarship bill was passed which would provide financial assistance to Indian children in the State. Four tribes were mentioned in the legislation as being eligible for this assistance, including both the MicMac and Maliseet Tribes. A number of A.A.I. members have taken advantage of this program. During this period the University of Maine Board of Trustees took special action to assist all the Indians in the state by granting free lodging, fees, tuition, etc. to Maine Indian youth. In addition, the A.A.I. has developed several private scholarship sources.

Some of the A.A.I.'s most significant steps towards state recognition of the problems of Aroostook County Indians have also come in the area of education. In April, 1972 for instance, Governor Curtis wrote to A.A.I. President Terry Polchies that he had instructed Merideth Ring, Supervisor of Indian Education for the State, to advocate and develop special educational programing for off-reservation Indians. He said that he felt that the problems of off-reservation Indians were as great as those of on-reservation Indians. In October, 1972, Carroll McGary, Commissioner of Maine's Department of Education and Cultural Resources, asked the Maine Education Council to reestablish its Indian Education Advisory Committee to investigate the problems of Indian education in Aroostook. This committee has met on several occasions and is making significant progress. Three of its members belong to the A.A.I.: Shirley Levasseur (Maliseet), Ronald Gideon (MicMac), and Joseph A. Tomah (Maliseet). In November 1972, at the request of Merideth Ring the A.A.I. Board elected a five member Aroostook Indian School Committee, and two additional members to serve as alternates; the committee includes the three members of the Education Advisory Committee and Winnefred Everett (Maliseet), Yvonne Jewell (MicMac), Brenda Polchies (Maliseet) and Roger Choteau (Osage). The School Committee will direct the activities of the State's Indian Education Unit and will advise the A.A.I. Board on all Youth programing.

B. Adult Education. The A.A.I. has developed several adult education courses in conjunction with Houlton High School. These courses include consumer classes held in the fall of 1971 at the home of Mrs. Shirley Levasseur and basket making classes conducted in the spring of 1972. Future consumer and craft classes are planned for the spring of 1973. Maine Indian Education conducted a survey of the educational goals and interests of adult Indians on the three reservations and in Aroostook County during the summer of 1972. Shortly thereafter Mrs. Roberta Polchies, (Maliseet) was hired on a part time basis to coordinate and experimental adult education program under Maine Indian Education in Aroostook; the program, however, never got off the ground. In the future we expect that the Aroostook Indian School Committee will devote considerable time towards developing adult education programs to serve all the Indians in Aroostook.

C. Housing. The A.A.I.'s effort in the area of housing has been two-fold: first we have responded to individual needs for housing on an immediate basis; second, we have been involved in the development of new low-income housing units. Both of these efforts have been equally important. In the course of this past year and one half we have placed at least 10 Indian families in apartments which they required on an immediate basis. In this same line, the A.A.I. has worked with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. to acquire several worn out trailers from the Acadia National Park site in Bar Harbor. To date one of these trailers has been placed in Mars Hill for an elderly Micmac man and another has been placed in Ludlow for a very large Maliseet family to attach to their home for extra bedroom space. We intend to have two other trailers repaired at the Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute before they are delivered to some needy Indian family. We feel that this is a project that places people in units which may be substandard but are at least an improvement over what they had before.

3.

In the area of low-income housing development, the A.A.I. was responsible for acquiring 25 units of Section 23 Leased Rental Housing for the Town of Houlton; an addition of at least a half million dollars to the town's economy over the next 20 years. On the advice of the Mr. Eben Ellwell, Director of the Maine Housing Authority, the A.A.I. did not try to sell this program to the people of Houlton at the town meeting in March 1972, because it was suggested the the project would be voted down as a result of the white fear that low income housing might attract more Indians to Houlton. For this reason the job of selling the idea of low-income housing to the people was given over to the Houlton Regional Development Corporation the local industrial council. The housing is now under construction and it is expected that at least 7 Indian families will be placed in those new units.

The development of low-income housing opportunities for Indians has been a very slow process. The A.A.I. started on this project several years ago. In 1970, for instance, the A.A.I. acquired a letter of commitment from Houlton Town Manager, Arthur Curtis promising that the next appointment to the Houlton Housing Authority would be Indian; there have been no appointments made since that time, however, and there has been only one meeting. Now that some progress has been made in Houlton, the A.A.I. will be looking towards developing housing opportunities in other areas of Aroostook.

D. Employment. Like housing, employment has been a difficult "nut to crack" for the A.A.I. During the last year and one half the A.A.I. has been responsible for the placement of perhaps 15-20 Indians in jobs, although some of these have been either marginal or part time. The A.A.I. has also begun to work with the Maine Employment Security Commission. After a long series of discussions and false starts M.E.S.C. finally hired a minority employment worker in the Houlton Office, Mr. Ben Labobe (MicMac) Mr. Labobe remained on that job for six months,

until it was made clear to him that he could not support his family at the extremely low pay scale he was being offered. There was also a certain amount of resistance to Mr. Labobe's placement in the Houlton office. We are now discussing this matter with the M.E.S.C. as well as the possibility of bringing certain Department of Labor Programs to bear on the problems of Aroostook County Indians.

E. Health. Although there has been no authoritative study to document the health needs of Aroostook Indians, it is obvious to the observer that unmet needs are very great. The A.A.I. has taken some concrete steps in this area:

- In October, 1971 we approached the Indian Health Service, a unit inside the Public Health Service in Washington, D.C.. At that time we were in a delegation with other Maine Indians, including Commissioner Stevens of the Maine Department of Indian Affairs. Because of our non-recognized status and because of the Passamaquoddy and Peonobscot limited state recognition, we were easily brushed aside by the Indian Health Service.
- In November, 1971 we met with the Tribal Chiefs at the Department of Indian Affairs about seeking a health planning grant through the Regional Office of the Public Health Service in Boston. An application was developed but again, because of opposition of local white agencies, it was blocked.
- In March, 1972, we decided to strike out independently against these health problems and develop a program on our own. We therefore, met with the local non-Indian dentists, Public Health Nurses, and Health and Welfare personnel. As a result of these meetings we decided to apply for a dental program that would serve the Indian and low income non-Indian communities.

The purpose of the program was to be dental education, preventive dentistry, and referrals. Funds were sought from a number of sources and received from the New England Regional Commission and Americans For Children's Relief. The Maine Division of Dental Health has agreed to supply certain equipment and the Aroostook Health Services Development Corporation, our local 314B Health Planning Agency has agreed to supply certain technical services. Although funds for this program became available December 1, 1972, a hygienist has yet to be hired.

F. Welfare The A.A.I. does not see itself as a welfare oriented agency, neither in terms of providing direct assistance nor in terms of welfare rights, per ce. There are however, many services provided by local agencies, including monetary assistance, surplus food, special training, counselling, etc. that is not normally taken full advantage of by the Indian people. It has been the job of all the staff from time to time to deal with this service delivery problem. The outreach workers and the social worker have a particular responsibility in this area and have served great numbers of the Indian people in this way. We have had particular problems with certain town welfare directors not willing to give the proper assistance to Indians. For this reason we have opened discussion with the State Department of Health and Welfare about the matter of State General Assistance, which by state law has a particular involvement in Indian welfare cases. We expect that in the future this will become a major area for joint inquiry by the State and the A.A.I.

G. Alcoholism. Although, as was explained above, the A.A.I.'s alcoholism grant from O.E.O. was aimed at alcoholism prevention in a very broad sense, we have made dealing with the alcoholism problem a major program area throughout the period of this report.

- In August, 1971, the A.A.I. and the Aroostook Mental Health Services signed an agreement that should the A.M.H.S. alcoholism program be funded, the two organizations would jointly develop an Indian operated Halfway house in Aroostook.
- In October, 1971, Terry Polchies, Tom Battiste, and Greg Buesing spent a week at the Bangor Halfway House and the Bangor Counseling Center's Alcoholism Rehabilitation Center. After talking with the Staff and patients of these operations, we became aware of certain possible difficiencies in the treatment of Indian alcoholics. As a result we initiated numerous meetings with the Bangor Counselling Center and various tribal leaders to look into this problem. The B.C..C even developed a funding proposal for the creation of a special Indian unit within their A.R.C.; this proposal however, has been temporarily held up because of an on-going study in the Department of Indian Affairs.
- In December, 1971 the A.A.I. developed a proposal for the Department of Indian Affairs to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism to fund a study of the Indian alcoholism problem in Maine, which will at the end of one year produce a comprehensive plan on how available resources might best be brought to bear on the problem. The study will include the Aroostook county Indian people.; the A.A.I. President, Terry Polchies serves on the advisory committee for this program along with the three other tribal governors.

When the A.A.I.'s Alcoholism Prevention Program was taken under the N.I.A.A.A., we decided to give the new social worker position special responsibility for working with Indian alcoholics. It is too soon to see how this has worked out.

H. Financial Status and Administrative Capability. During the past year and one half the A.A.I.'s financial status has increased substantially. The staffing programs mentioned above, although operating on a hairline budget, have some depth in terms of refunding, particularly in the areas of our alcoholism program, legal services and dental program. We operate on the assumption, however, that federal funds are going to dry up some day, perhaps very soon. The A.A.I.'s financial stability, therefore, depends upon recognition which will be taken up below. There are other areas in which our financial and administrative strength have increased which are worthy of note:

When the A.A.I. entered this period, our financial books were handled either by the Ricker Financial office or by an accountant in Bangor. The A.A.I. presently handles all its books at its own office. When this period began the A.A.I. occupied two small rooms at Ricker. In June 1972, we purchased a building at 1 Bowdoin St. in Houlton to serve as our central office. Through the help of Project Concern, the building was changed from a residence to our office. The A.A.I. has also made other important capital expenditures, including the purchase of a van, a photocopier, a mimeograph machine and an additional typewriter.

Through the assistance of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs and the General Services Administration, the A.A.I. was able to acquire a considerable excess property to furnish our offices with.

We have revised and updated our personnel policies and are now considering the same to our bylaws.

I. Recognition of Indian Status. This is the most important area for the A.A.I.'s continued existence as a service-provider agency. It is also the key aspiration of the Indian people in Aroostook County to be acknowledged as Indian. In a sense everything the A.A.I. does is pointed at the issue of recognition. The camp for instance, is intended to strengthen Indian values within the Indian children so that they might go on in life acknowledging the value of their own Indian status. And when the A.A.I. members carry themselves with the bearing of a recognized Indian Community, the Non-Indian community from within, we have taken numerous steps towards federal and state recognition:

In the area of education, Governor Curtis, the Maine Education Council, the University of Maine, and the 105th Legislature have all recognized the educational needs of off-reservation Indians in Aroostook County as is mentioned above in the section on Youth Opportunities.

We have established a good relationship with the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. We have met with Commissioner Bruce (Mohawk) and Assistant Commissioners McNabb (Micmac) and Stevens (Oneida) all of whom are eastern Indians. We also had B.I.A. representation at a Board Training Session that we held in Houlton during December of 1971. The only direct service the B.I.A. has been able to provide has been in the acquisition of surplus and excess property, including furniture for our office and some trailers which we are using for emergency housing. We have also established a good relationship with the State Department of Indian Affairs and with Commissioner John Stevens (Passamaquoddy). D.I.A. has assigned one Emergency Employment Act position to the A.A.I. which is now filled by Tom Battiste (Micmac). The A.A.I. has also provided certain services to the D.I.A., including technical assistance in the writing of several grant proposals. In turn, the D.I.A. has included the A.A.I. in certain

of these, e.g. the Alcoholism Field Survey, or has expressed interest in doing so in the future, e.g. the Maine Indian Police Department.

- As mentioned above, the Indian Health Service, which is part of the Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, refused to assist any Indian communities in Maine. Another branch of H.E.W. the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, however, has funded the A.A.I.'s Alcoholism Prevention Program, with specially earmarked "Indian Money". This may be the first time "Indian money" has come into the state for any Indian group.
- The A.A.I. is participating on a national and regional level in different organizations that are working towards recognition of eastern Indians. The A.A.I. has reached new levels of cooperation with other Maine Indian communities. An ad hoc committee of the Maine Indian Governors has been formed, including the A.A.I. President.

In the future the A.A.I. will be taking several key steps to insure the Indian rights and status of Micmac and Maliseet people in Maine. We have developed an essay on our rights and treaties, which will be published shortly, we have worked closely with the Maine Committee of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission which is expected to conduct a hearing in January on the issues of state and federal recognition for Maine Indians. We have developed a working relationship with the Indian Unit of Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc. which might be very useful in developing legal claim for recognition; the addition of an attorney to our own staff, of course, greatly increases our own capability for working towards this.