

From: Sarah Boatner [<mailto:Sarah.Boatner@uvm.edu>]
Sent: Tuesday, November 19, 2019 9:55 AM
Subject: Morrill Land Grant Act Research

Hello ...,

Greetings from the Northeast, the traditional homelands of the Abenaki people. We are a group of students from the University of Vermont (UVM) collaborating with the Elnu Abenaki tribe on a research project about the impacts of the Morrill Land Grant Act on indigenous peoples. The Land Grant Act of 1862, in order to create agricultural universities in each state, made grants of Federal land (often in the midwest region) to be sold to create endowments for the universities. We are looking into whose homelands these were in 1862, by what means the original People were dispossessed, and how the Land Grant Act itself impacted those People. Our research shows that although the Land Grant Act may not have directly resulted in the displacement of native american groups, it was U.S. policy to remove indigenous people in order to have access to “open” land. This policy of displacement helped to pass the Land Grant Act.

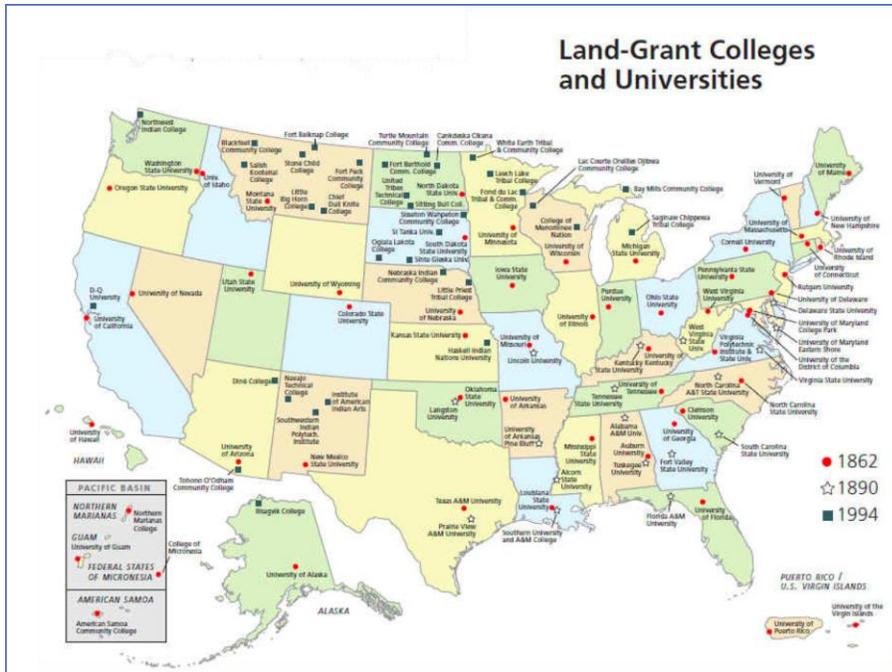
Through our research, we believe that your People were among those deeply impacted by the implementation of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, to the ultimate benefit of the State of Vermont and its Land Grant University, UVM. We are trying to make these connections in order to understand the implications better.

Any information or resources you can provide would be incredibly helpful to our research. We are working closely with a representative from the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs, realizing that, in the case of the University of Vermont, the granted land is located in other parts of the country. We would also be open to phone or skype calls, or to answer any questions you may have about this research.

We are also including a copy of our project proposal, which lays out our goals, objectives, and context in greater detail.

Best,

Elizabeth Mackin, Jack Goldman, James Sleigh, Joe Gallucci, Marisa Cigliano, Sarah Boatner



Source: United States Department of Agriculture

Proposal Submitted To:

Rich Holschuh
VT Commission on Native American Affairs
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Zachary Ispa-Landa, UVM NR 206 Professor
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Proposal Submitted On:

September 27, 2019

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Community Partner

Rich Holschuh, our community partner, works with the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs and is a public liaison for the Elnu Abenaki Tribe. He also collaborates with other tribal groups and builds connections with businesses, local and state agencies, and public and private educational institutions. He is passionate about honoring the true story of the land we all live on, with a particular interest in the implications of the Land Grant Act.

Problem Definition

The Land Grant Act of 1862 led to the establishment of The University of Vermont and State Agricultural College. The effects, implications, and resolutions of this wholesale colonizing dispossession on indigenous peoples have never been investigated or broadly acknowledged.

Context

Origin of this project

This project was created by Rich Holschuh to give a voice to the indigenous community who have been displaced by the colonizing policies of the United States government. The University of Vermont is one of 112 land grant universities in the United States, which were established in three separate acts over a period of more than 130 years (Ramaswamy, 2015). We have decided to focus on the first of these acts, which was passed in 1862 and is arguably the most influential of the three in the context of impact on indigenous livelihoods. The act states that “each eligible state receive a total of 30,000 acres (120 km²) of federal land, either within or contiguous to its boundaries, for each member of Congress the state had as of the census of 1860. This land, or the proceeds from its sale, was to be used toward establishing and funding the educational institutions described above.” (Morrill Act, 1862) The act provided that if no federal land was in the boundaries of the recipient state then a scrip was issued to provide land elsewhere to fund the institution (Holschuh, 2018).

Background

There is a lack of information about how the Vermont Land Grant Act affected indigenous communities outside of Vermont. Initial search results detail the Land Grant Act as a basis for expanding and democratizing American education. This Act gave land to the states for the purpose of selling that land on the open market to raise funds in order to create opportunities for education and encourage settler occupation and development of Federal land. These searches did not share the story of the indigenous people that were displaced during these land confiscations and allocations. There is a large gap in knowledge regarding the identity of and impact upon

these indigenous communities. The circumstances of their dispossession, the uses of their homelands afterward, and the implications today are also unacknowledged.

The Land Grant Act, 1862

Justin Morrill was a Vermont Representative and Senator for 44 years. His most well-known contribution was the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, which seized land belonging to indigenous communities to fund the development of state agricultural schools throughout the United States. The Land Grant Act of 1862, was designed to give federal land to the states who could then sell this land in order to raise funds to endow the founding of agricultural universities and programs. Vermont Senator Justin Morrill was claimed to be the father of the act.

With no qualifying federal land within its borders and five congress members, Vermont was allocated 150,000 acres of land elsewhere in the continental United States. The land that Vermont was given was primarily located in the midwest. This land was procured as a direct result of the conflict, fraud and forced removal of tribal communities and people. Our community partner believes that the tribal communities that were originally on that land were displaced as a result of this Act.

Statement of Privilege, Identity & Positionality

We as a group acknowledge our privileges, identities, and positionalities in the context of this project, as non-indigenous, university-educated researchers at a Land Grant state university. We understand that by virtue of being students at the University of Vermont (UVM) we in some way benefit and succeed in our academic spheres on dispossessed Native (Abenaki) land, in an institution that was funded at the start with profits from seizing Native territory in the mid-1800's.

We do not identify as indigenous nor have we experienced life as an indigenous person in North America. As a result, we cannot fully understand that experience. Among the six members of this group, we are all white, or white-identified. There is diversity in identities of gender and sexuality, however we all still benefit from our own forms of privilege.

We recognize that our individual privileged opportunities of relative comfort, access to resources, and ability to enjoy expansive landscapes are possible, in part, because of colonial dispossession, resource allocation, genocide, cultural suppression, and imposed systems of Western power onto Native communities throughout the history of the United States.

No action can undo history, but we hope that through our research into this national and state legacy we can help to build a more decolonized understanding of the United States-- specifically

its educational institutions-- and the communities impacted by its promulgation. We also hope to contribute to lifting native voices that have been silenced and forgotten in lieu of crafting white history. These stories and experiences are important and hold validity in our country's past. Encouraging exposure and volume to these real histories of the United States is a significant part of the decolonization process of our country, by acknowledging its colonial beginnings.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Plans

Primary Goal: We intend to create an accessible means for people to examine the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 and its implications through a decolonized lens.

Secondary Goal: Ensuring a visual and integrative representation of this history is widely available through the medium of a map.

Overview of Survey Methods: We will first search archives and databases from the National Archives and the BLM General Land Office Records in order to find Vermont's land parcels given to the state under the Land Grant Act of 1862. We are fairly certain that this has never been analyzed in Vermont so we are hoping to find research from other states. Rich has told us that there has been research done at Iowa State University (<https://www.landgrant.iastate.edu/land-grant-parcel-maps>) that mapped Iowa's parcels of land that were given to other states by the Federal Governmental after the act was signed. We will contact Ray Hansen from ISU (that has led the ISU Land Grant Project for a number of years) to find where they got the information for this study.

To gain a deeper understanding of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, we will compile resources about the act. To do this we plan on searching academic journals using *Academic Premier*. We hope to understand if this act was inspired by some other legislation from elsewhere. We also hope to obtain a copy of the Act online to try to understand it on a deeper level. We believe that reading the actual text will help us to understand its original purpose from a western perspective .

We plan to explore the online National Archives in order to find which parcels of land were given to Vermont under the Act. We are hoping that somewhere in the archives we can find information on how this land was taken and by whom. Most of our survey methods will be using online resources, but we are also open to the possibility of conducting interviews with members of affected tribes in order to create a more complete history of the act and its effects.

Strategies & Objectives

Objectives to meet primary goal:

Objective A: Conduct a thorough literature review and primary document analysis of existing sources on the Land Grant Act.

Objective B: Interview Rich Holschuh on separate occasions for his perspectives on the Act. These conversations may lead to additional people that we can interview.

Objective C: Draft an op-ed highlighting the history and present day implications of the Act. Contact local media organizations locally and nationally to publish the op-ed.

Objective D: Prepare an engaging presentation for the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs.

Objectives to meet secondary goal:

Objective A: Gather data from the Bureau of Land Management and information from Iowa State Land Grant Project.

Objective B: Generate an interactive map of Vermont’s original Land Grant parcels using a mapping software.

Deliverables for primary goal:

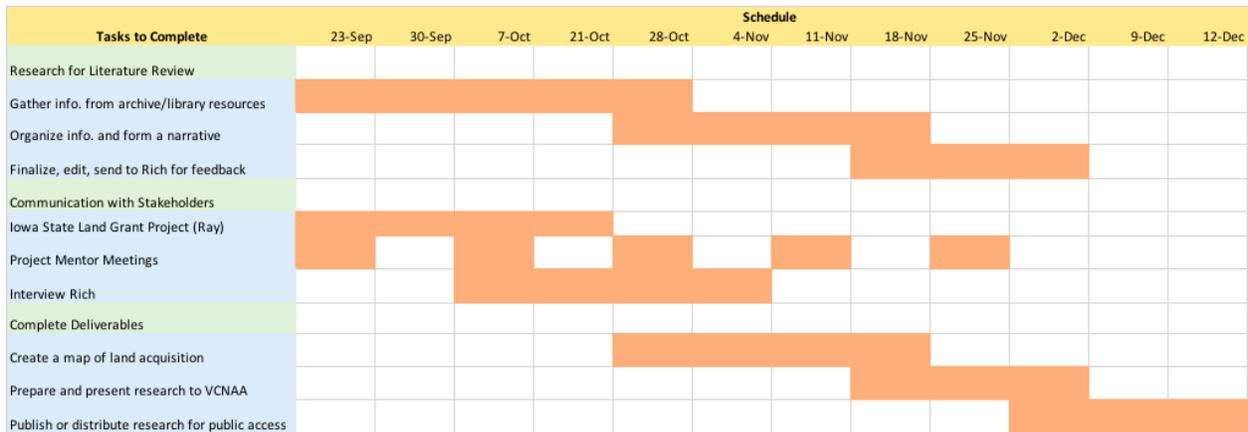
Promised:

- Create a map or maps of the US indicating the location of the individual land parcels for Vermont’s land grant college, identify original Indigenous homelands, and the displacement of those communities then and now.
- Published op-ed in local and national news organizations.

Reach:

- Present findings to the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs.

Time Constraints (Gantt Chart)



Other Constraints

Scope

It is valuable to acknowledge the possibility that the time given for this project to play out and the steps needed to achieve its goals may not allow a full completion of the deliverables stated above. As students in their final year of college, with other classes, responsibilities, and concerns, we've agreed that a minimum status of completion would involve a compiled and documented report of our research and another form of this information for distribution to a larger audience. If some of our desired deliverables take us into the next semester, we've agreed to continue whatever necessary work remains.

Resources

Conducting thorough research into the Land Grant Act will involve the use of archived information that may be difficult to find and/or access if sources are located out of state, guarded by certain restrictions, or simply non-existent due to policy or bias. Personal accounts we might gather through interviews depends on the availability and interest of people we contact. (These contacts would be either given to us by Rich, or found through research into current native communities whose ancestors experienced dispossession. To be clear, we are not certain that we will interview anyone other than Rich yet.)

Politics and Power

Most of the information needed for this research reveals a history untold to the larger public, one of government-imposed violence upon Native communities. It's valuable to acknowledge that uncovering these histories will not be of any benefit or favor to institutions involved, such as Vermont and UVM, and that they might take the extra effort to restrict our access and progress.

Inherent or Expected

As mentioned above in the Statement of Privilege, the information we're seeking out does not belong to us or our culture's history. Taking on the perspective and stories of Native communities as privileged college students can only go so deep before it leads to wrongful assumptions or taking voices from those who own these experiences. By remaining in close contact with our community partner, we will do our best work to deliver this history of land grant institutions through a decolonized lens. Through a western perspective, the Land Grant Act was a justified, rational plan to develop agricultural colleges and land use across the nation, fulfilling its Manifest Destiny. An indigenous perspective on this same Act is quite different.

Assumptions

A project like this requires out-of-the-box thinking, testing our comfort zones and exploring new fields or modes of research we're not familiar with. The information we desire to access will involve some deep digging into United States history, facing power restrictions, as well as determined and focused effort.

Resources and Needs

- Dr. David Massell, UVM history professor and North American indigenous history expert, has agreed to be our professional mentor.
- Rich Holschuh serves on the Vermont Commission for Native American Affairs and is a public liaison for the Elnu Abenaki Tribe. As one of our mentors, interviews and knowledge we glean from him will be central to our success.
- UVM Extension will also be essential to our search for information pertaining to land in Vermont and beyond.
- The University of Iowa is one of the only other universities, to our current knowledge, that has looked into its land grant status and history. They have compiled research and resources that mirror the work that we intend to do. Collaboration with stakeholders at UIA will supplement our findings.
- Chris Burns will be our contact for Special Collections at the Howe Library.
- We will rely on information from the National Archives and the BLM General Land Office Records to gather locations of land parcels given to Vermont.

Evaluation & Assessment

This project is unique in that the newness of this research makes it difficult to predict what our final outcome will be. It is likely that our methods of evaluation will change as the project progresses. However, we hope in the end to have mapped every parcel of land granted to Vermont (in the form of scrip) to create a land grant university, to have learned who was originally on that land, and what happened to these people and the land after it was sold by the state of Vermont. We will measure accountability by maintaining frequent (weekly or biweekly) contact with Rich, our project mentor, and each other to discuss progress, and will demonstrate success through our final deliverables.

The endpoint of this project is an understanding of the impacts of the Morrill Land Grant Act on indigenous groups, as it served to help create the agricultural programs at the University of Vermont. We understand that this Act and its implications represents a part of the national process of colonization of Indigenous bodies and land that was, and is, also employed here in Vermont. This final goal will likely not be reached in full by our group, but will be an ongoing goal for future groups, organizations, and individuals. We believe the most effective way to hand off this project to future groups would be to publish our findings online in an accessible forum and format with a detailed documentation of the land that formed UVM as well as any additional information we can gather about each land parcel. We intend to keep a running document of challenges we run into in order to better document our experiences, as well as to be as transparent as possible about our research process. The audience for this project is everyone involved with the University of Vermont, the state and national governments, indigenous groups impacted by the Morrill Act, and those who lived or are currently living on the land given to and sold by Vermont. Understanding the impacts of the land grant system is relevant to everyone across the U.S., but we are focusing specifically on UVM.

This project will likely have vast intended and unintended impacts which will be hard to measure directly. We will evaluate the intended impacts of our projects by presenting our findings to the Commission on Native Affairs and hearing their feedback on our research. We will also work to write and publish articles with our findings and gather feedback that way. As an advocate and member of the Vermont Indigenous community, Rich can also provide feedback on how our project impacts these groups throughout Vermont. As a faculty member of the University of Vermont, Zac can provide us with insight into how this project impacts those who work at the university. Similarly, Rich and Zac, as well as the Commission on Native Affairs, will be able to provide information on the unintended impacts of this project at a community level and a university-wide level. By staying informed with local news sources, we can see if any other news outlets pick up our articles and research and if this research influences other states or groups as well.

Overall, we will be evaluated on the amount of information we are able to collect over the course of the semester as well as our ability to present this information in an effective way through visuals, written articles, and oral presentations.

Works Cited

An Act donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories which may provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts. 7 U.S.C. ch. 13 § 301 et seq. (1862). <http://legisworks.org/congress/37/session-2/chap-130.pdf>

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