

**Shawnee Indian Mission Foundation Statement
Regarding Shawnee Ownership of the Shawnee Indian Mission**

January 21, 2023

The Shawnee Indian Mission Foundation (SIMF) opposes legislation for conveyance of the Mission's 12 acres and 3 historic buildings to the Shawnee Tribe of Miami, Oklahoma. This tribe, often referred to as the "Loyal Shawnee", is one of three successors to the historic Shawnee Tribe (the others are the Eastern Shawnee Tribe and the Absentee Shawnee Tribe).

The non-profit Foundation is composed of community members who support the Mission through fundraising for operations of the Mission, collaborating on programming with the City of Fairway, developing relationships with a wide range of people to more accurately tell the Mission's diverse history, and planning for the Mission's future. The Foundation is a partner with City of Fairway (Mission operator) and works with the State of Kansas (KS Historical Society). The Foundation has many other supporting community partners that represent many facets of the Mission history.

The Shawnee Indian Mission belongs to many people - the people of Kansas, to First Nations peoples located throughout our country, to descendants of the settlers who traveled West for new opportunity, to the families whose ancestors fought in the Civil War, to the thousands of volunteers who for nearly 100 years have worked to preserve the Mission's past, to all the people of Kansas, to supporters who have helped preserve the Mission, and to people everywhere who can benefit from knowing about the past and its relevance for today. The Mission is a National Historic Landmark, our Nation's highest historic designation. This designation was bestowed because of the many cultures and events that are a part of the Mission's past.

The mere existence of buildings that for 15 years served as a Native American boarding school, is controversial. Sensitivity to these concerns, a full, unvarnished airing of facts and perspectives is essential. The Mission's history is sometimes uncomfortable, but the past is an excellent teacher. It reflects our nation's complexity and diversity and all that can be learned from it. The Mission was foundational to the communities that surround it and remains an active part of these communities to this day. It is a shared place and does not belong to any one group.

Why we oppose conveyance of the Mission to the Shawnee Tribe:

- The Shawnee are the Mission's namesake and are forever connected to the site, but the Shawnee Tribe (Miami, OK) is only one part of the Mission's history. Aboriginal tribes in this area, such as the Kaw Nation, have long-standing, continual connection to the land. The aboriginal Kaw Nation, from which the name Kansas is derived, sent a letter of concern to Governor Kelly on January 4 and have since issued a press release opposing Shawnee ownership of the land. **"The Kaw Nation opposes any legislative effort related to conveyance of the 'Shawnee Indian Mission' lands to any tribal entity other than the Kaw Nation."** Instead they **favor ownership remaining with the State of Kansas and a collaborative approach** with the 21 other (non aboriginal) tribes that had students attending the Mission (who represent approximately 2/3 of its students)..
- **The Mission has been important to many other people for over 180 years.** Kansas State and Territorial History is rooted in the Mission. The vote for Kansas Statehood occurred in the East Building. The Mission served as the office of the first Territorial Governor. The Bogus Legislature also met at the Mission. It played important roles in the Trails West and the Civil War. It is valued

by the thousands of students and adults who have visited the Mission and learned about our past, and people everywhere who want to learn the 183 years of Mission stories. These people should be guaranteed a voice in the Mission's future. Conveyance of the land gives no such guarantee.

- Corroborating legal opinions agree that once land is conveyed to a Federally recognized tribe, such as the Shawnee of Miami, OK, a process is in place for the land to become sovereign territory and no agreements for use prior to the conveyance are enforceable. Local and State entities will have limited criminal jurisdiction on the land but will not have jurisdiction over how the land is used. All control is in the hands of one tribe and the Federal Government. Permitted tribal use includes any form of economic development. In addition, the National Historic Landmark designation would be lost by conveyance, according to its terms of the designation. Although the Mission resides inside a neighborhood near the heart of the Kansas City metro area, access to the site is not guaranteed, and no other voices have a say in what happens on the land.
- Concerns regarding the state of the Mission's historical buildings used as rationale for conveyance greatly overstate issues with the Mission's condition. The Mission is an active site, hosting more than 10,000 visitors a year. Structures are 180 years old and naturally have maintenance and repair needs, but public spaces are used every day and are in stable condition. The buildings are monitored and maintained by the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS) on a regular basis. Plans for restoring the unoccupied West Building, (the State's oldest residence) have been delayed by the Shawnee partnership inaction and so it remains unrestored/unoccupied yet is structurally sound.
- Within the past two years Shawnee Chief Ben Barnes (Miami OK) and the Foundation agreed to partner to elevate historic interpretation unique to the Shawnee, and to build relationships that bring people together through understanding, respect and healing. Areas for cooperation were agreed upon and dates were mutually established. Shortly after the partnership was established, projects stalled due to lack of Chief Barnes's participation. Additionally, while operating in decision making roles with the Foundation, the Chief Barnes was making undisclosed plans that were contrary to the national model of collaboration mutually agreed upon. Given these experiences, there is evidence for concern about Chief Barnes's (Miami, OK) plans to steward the Mission.

The KSHS, is the public owner of the Mission, is a broad-based public organization accountable to the people of Kansas. KSHS can continue to build partnerships to seek and tell the Mission's past. KSHS will uphold the Mission's National Historic Landmark designation, has scholarly resources and networks and will present fact-based history in collaboration with existing and future partners as well as with other interested parties. **The Kaw Nation is but one of the tribes that supports Kansas ownership and opposes Shawnee ownership.**

For these reasons the **Shawnee Indian Mission Foundation strongly opposes the conveyance of Mission property to the Shawnee Tribe of Miami, OK. It is not in the best interest of the State of Kansas or of any of the many groups and individuals who comprise the Mission's history.** The Legislature should uphold the rights of all these peoples who are a part of this State Historic Site and National Historic Landmark and keep the stewardship of the Mission with the State of Kansas (KSHS).

For additional information and details, go to the **City of Fairway** (Mission operating partner) [website](#).