

Becoming Brothertown

*Native American Ethnogenesis and
Endurance in the Modern World*

CRAIG N. CIPOLLA



“This is indeed a significant contribution to the historical anthropology of coalescent communities with Indigenous roots and to archaeological approaches to ethnogenesis in Native North America.”

—Martin D. Gollivan, author of *James River Chiefdoms: The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake*

“This book considers the various means and contexts of identity formation, endurance, and change of the Brother-town Indians. Cipolla gives voice to the community—both past and present—rather than standing as interlocutor in their stead.”

—Kathleen L. Hull, author of *Pestilence and Persistence: Yosemite Indian Demography and Culture in Colonial California*

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Becoming Brothertown: Native American Ethnogenesis in the Modern World

Craig N. Cipolla

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Histories of New England typically frame the region's Indigenous populations in terms of effects felt from European colonialism: the ravages of epidemics and warfare, the restrictions of reservation life, and the influences of European-introduced ideas, customs, and materials. Much less attention is given to how Algonquian peoples actively used and transformed European things, endured imposed hardships, and negotiated their own identities. In *Becoming Brothertown*, Craig N. Cipolla searches for a deeper understanding of Native American history.

Covering the eighteenth century to the present, the book explores the emergence of the Brothertown Indians, a "new" community of Native peoples formed in direct response to colonialism and guided by the vision of Samson Occom, a Mohegan Indian and ordained Presbyterian minister. Breaking away from their home settlements of coastal New England during the late eighteenth century, members of various tribes migrated to Oneida Country in central New York State in hopes of escaping East Coast land politics and the corrupting influences of colonial culture. In the nineteenth century, the new community relocated once again, this time to present-day Wisconsin, where the Brothertown Indian Nation remains centered today.

Cipolla combines historical archaeology, gravestone studies, and discourse analysis to tell the story of the Brothertown Indians. The book develops a pragmatic approach to the study of colonialism while adding an archaeological perspective on Brothertown history, filling a crucial gap in the regional archaeological literature.

"A significant contribution to the historical anthropology of coalescent communities with Indigenous roots and to archaeological approaches to ethnogenesis in Native North America."

— Martin D. Gallivan, author of *James River Chiefdoms*

Craig N. Cipolla is a lecturer in historical archaeology at the University of Leicester. He received funding for his work with the Brothertown Indian Nation from the National Science Foundation, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and the Penn Center for Native American Studies.

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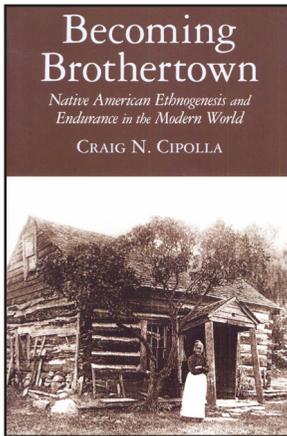
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Becoming Brothertown: Native American Ethnogenesis and Endurance in the Modern World

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Reviewed by Diana DiPaolo Loren, Peabody Museum, Harvard University

In *Becoming Brothertown*, Craig N. Cipolla details the ethnogenesis of the Brothertown Indians, a Native American community centered in Wisconsin. Brothertown identity was constructed and materialized over several generations.

Moving from home settlements in New England during the eighteenth century, members of various Native American communities migrated to central New York State. In the nineteenth century, the new community relocated once again to present-day Wisconsin. In his volume, Cipolla provides a richly human narrative of how this particular community marked, materialized, and commemorated identity and history in objects and space.

Cipolla begins with a discussion of pragmatism, the theoretical approach he espouses throughout the volume. Drawing inspiration from 19th-century philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, Cipolla forwards an integrated pragmatic approach to the study of colonialism; that is, how knowledge of Brothertown histories created through various sources informs and shapes current engagement and future inquiry. His discussion of pragmatism in archaeological theory is exceedingly clear and informed. Through his discussion, he argues that a pragmatic approach is integral to his study of Brothertown ethnogenesis precisely because pragmatism is attentive to continuities and reflexivity of social life, including the changing and processual understanding of identity and ethnogenesis inherent in this philosophical perspective. Brothertown identity was (and continues to be) shaped through history, materialized and commemorated in multiple locations. As Cipolla (pp. 20–21) notes, pragmatism allows for this kind of investigation because it “...avoids dichotomizing scientific knowledge from other epistemological modes, recognizing alternative perspectives in the past.” While the recognition of multiple pasts and voices is a common theme in postcolonial archaeology, Cipolla lays bare the process of his research methodology and is particularly attentive to and vocal about the ways in which interactions with Brothertown community members and other stakeholders have influenced his writing.

Following his discussion of pragmatism, Cipolla provides an historical overview of the Brothertown spaces and peoples from the colonial period through the present-day; the complexities of Brothertown history, the ways that individual community members, such as Samson Ocom, a Mohegan Indian and ordained Presbyterian minister, worked through issues of cultural continuity and change. This rich history is the backdrop for the *Brothertown Archaeology Project*, the research program generated from tribal interests that combines historical archaeology, grave markers and space, and discourse analysis. In his discussion, Cipolla weaves together archaeological data with historical, archival, and tribal information to provide a

Book Review

detailed narrative of Brothertown ethnogenesis. Throughout, he approaches textual and material evidence as human traces that were constructed and manipulated, allowing for an understanding of the complex manipulation of text and objects, place and people in Brothertown identity making, community (re)building, and practices of commemoration.

Becoming Brothertown: Native American Ethnogenesis and Endurance in the Modern World is a well-written, well-formatted, and thoroughly engaging book. It is exceedingly accessible, and this is not something that can always be said for volumes using particularly nuanced theoretical approaches. Cipolla's approach to and description of cultural traces (material, textual, special) is particularly mindful. Throughout he advocates the efficacy of a pragmatic approach to decolonize past histories whilst informing current stakeholder engagements, not just for the Brothertown community but also in other colonial contexts. I highly recommend this noteworthy contribution to historical archaeology.