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Hibbing Historical Society
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Hibbing, MN 55746
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Minnesota Museum of
Mining
701 Lake St. W.
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Tower-Soudan
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ROOTPRINTS

Ojibwe Faces and Stories: The Legacy of Ancestral Portraits in the Eastman Johnson Lake Superior Indians Collection

By Dr. Linda Grover,
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University of Minnesota, Duluth, and
Exhibit Education Curator for the St. Louis
County Historical Society's Eastman Johnson
Exhibition, September 26 - 30, 2009*

In 1856 a young portrait and landscape artist looking for adventure and prosperity while visiting relatives in Superior began to draw the faces of the native Ojibwe and indigenous landscapes in an attempt to record a race and way of life that he was convinced would soon disappear. Those portraits and landscapes are of Ojibwe individuals and their environments shortly after an enormous and reluctant concession of birthright, both land and ties of the people to that land.



The Eastman Johnson collection is an interpretation of Ojibwe life in the Grand Portage Reservation and Pokegama Bay (Duluth-Superior) area drawn by a artist who, while drawing portraits and landscapes, also recorded the lives and faces of individuals, their families and communities a century and a half ago. The art dates from 1856, when Johnston visited and lived in the Pokegama Bay area, and 1857, when he traveled 150 miles up the north shore of Lake Superior to Grand Portage.

It will be our privilege to catch a glimpse

into the lives and lands of the Ojibwe people of Pokegama Bay and Grand Portage in 1856 and 1857 for a limited period exhibition at the Great Hall of the Depot. On September 26th the St. Louis County Historical Society will open the exhibit of the Eastman Johnson collection of Ojibwe portraits and landscapes with a formal evening fundraising gala in the Great Hall of the St. Louis County Heritage and Arts Center. The next day the entire collection of 13 oil paintings, 22 charcoal drawings, and one pastel will be open to the public; the exhibit will continue through October 1st. This is a rare opportunity to see the St. Louis County Historical Society's collection of all 36 pieces in its entirety. Along with the collection will be Ojibwe arts and artifacts from neighboring reservations, the UMD Tweed Museum, and the Society's collections as well as selected works of art



Kay Be Sen Day Way We Win, East Johnson (1824-1906), Charcoal on paper, ca. 1857, collection of the St. Louis County Historical Society

by contemporary Ojibwe artists.

Like everyone else who has viewed the Eastman Johnson collection of portraits and landscapes from the mid-1850s, I have favorites, particularly the ones that remind me of someone I know. To many Ojibwe of
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For more information on the Society's gala reception on September 26th for this rare exhibition of its Eastman Johnson collection and selected Ojibwe artifacts see page 10.