

Native Americans

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Drawings from Clark County cliff.



Long before the Europeans came upon this territory, many Indian tribes ruled the local area of Clark County and the lands of the Wabash River. The Potawatomi were the most popular of the tribes that lived between the Great Lakes and Ohio River, the Wabash River and the Mississippi River. Many Indian tribes inhabited the Northwest Territory after the Revolutionary War. The Wyandots, Miami, Shawnees, Delaware, Ottawas, Chippewas, and Potawatomi were the seven tribes known as the "Western Confederacy". They fought long and hard against the United States government until General Anthony Wayne conquered them in 1794. The Ottawas, Chippewas, and Potawatomi were a form of loose confederacy called the "Three Fires".

The Miami were the most powerful of the confederates. They were subdivided into the Miami of the River, the Miami of the West, and the Piankashaws. General William Henry Harrison described the Miami as the most extensive landowners in the Northwest. The Miami disliked the Potawatomi greatly. The Potawatomi were horse thieves. They would ride for long distances across the prairies and through the rivers. Suddenly, the Potawatomi would intrude into a frontier cabin killing cattle or stealing horses. Sometimes, the tribe would murder a helpless inmate or kidnap a young child or girl. The Potawatomi were real savages and were very disliked. They were known to the French-Canadians as "Les Poux," or those who have lice. This meant that the Potawatomi withheld uncleanly habits.

The Potawatomi were always on friendly terms with the Kickapoo, a small tribe near the Wabash River. These two tribes lived in mixed villages and grouped together to conquer small Illinois tribes. Even though they were considerably friendly and at times were within the same tribe,

their general appearance was very different. The Kickapoos' warriors were mainly tall and skinny. The Kickapoo women were quite graceful. The Potawatomi were shorter and heavier. They had darker skin and had less cleanliness. The Potawatomi women were greasy and rather large, The women were mistreated and were not highly regarded.

Besides fighting in war, each tribe had its own customs. Music was very important to the daily lives of the Native Americans. It was used in religion, fun, and entertaining stories at large gatherings. The drum was the center of their rituals and ceremonies. Each tribe had its own type of religious ceremonies. Some tribes believed that the power of pipes, feathers, plants, animals, and rocks could be transferred from the object to the people using them.

In Illinois and Indiana, most Indian tribes were seasonal hunters and gatherers. They grew gardens along rivers and streams. This helped them add to their normal diet of wild nuts, berries, and plants. Much of their diet included muscles of animals such as deer and clams. They hunted small animals like rabbits and squirrels with many different weapons. They used bows and arrows, spears, war clubs, long bows, pony bows, and blowguns. The addle addle was another weapon the Indians used to hunt -food. Addle addle is an Aztec word that is used to describe the weapon that has spanned the continents. This weapon was used to throw spears. It is a stick about the size of your arm that had been notched out at one end to have a hook and was flat at the other end so you could use it as a handle. The Indians would put traps in rivers and streams to try to catch fish. They made nets from the inner bark of certain trees. These weapons gave an assurance of food to the local Native Americans. Although they so masterfully created these weapons, they were quick to trade with European settlers for metal weapons such as steel arrowheads, axes, guns, and knives.



Drawing and imbedded bottle from county cliff.



The local Native Americans lived in many different types of homes. Before the introduction of log cabins, Native Americans had several types of dwellings. The wigwams and long houses

were some of the main types of homes. The long house was a designed permanent house. A few long houses were built together, with several families in each, to form a village. Around the village was built a barrier of tall logs to keep enemies out. The wigwam was a less permanent structure that went with the families as they moved from place to place, following their sources of food. One of the most common known types of housing was the teepee. Teepees were also used for frequent traveling. They were made out of tan buffalo hide. Native Americans would put drawings that symbolized different things to them on the teepees with dye.

Native American clothing was originally made from buckskin and leather. When they began to do business with the European fur traders, their clothing styles entered a stage of change as they received trade cloth from the European traders. An average article of Native American women's clothing included a wraparound skirt made of heavy trade cloth, cloth leggings worn just below the knee, a loose-fitting printed trade skirt, and moccasins. The local Native Americans man's basic clothing consisted of a breechcloth worn between the legs and held at the waist with a leather cord, cloth leggings worn at the mid-thigh, a colorful, printed trade shirt, and leather moccasins. Beadwork was also important in the Native American life. Tribes would sew designs using hundreds and thousands of glass beads bought from Europe. Ribbon work also became important once Native Americans began to trade with Europeans for silk ribbons.

It became unnecessary for the Native American women to dye their clothing once they could get trade cloth in many different colors. They still used natural dyes on their hair and skin. Both men and women wore jewelry with all clothing items. Beadwork ribbons, brooches and contour, and finger-woven sashes were worn both by men and women. Women also wore hair bows, necklaces, and shawls. Men wore scarves, deer or porcupine hair brooches, and work tattoos on their heads, chests, and stomachs. Hairstyles were quite elaborate, and along with clothing, could have been used to identify an Indians social status and the tribe they belonged to.

The Indians used many different types of tools. Stone and bone were the hardest and most available substance that could be made into tools, since metal tools were not available to them. Tools like arrowheads, spearheads, and fish hooks were used for hunting. Other tools like blades, hatchets, axes, saws, drills, and scrapers were used to make more useful items out of wood, bone, and animal hides. Gardeners used hoes made out of bone and antler rakes. A grinding stone was used to prepare food, such as cornmeal. A wooden mortar and pestle were also used to grind seed and grains. These tools provided much easier ways to produce food faster and in an easier way.

After many years of fighting for land, the Indians love for whiskey decreased the population in each tribe. Boats mostly brought in supplies of rum. This soon became the Indians best friend. It was not uncommon to see a drunken Potawatomi warrior after a long day of trading in everything for small portions of liquor. The effects of liquor brought about many fights and murders. Slowly, the effects of alcohol hurt the number of Indians within all different tribes.

The Indians many ways changed as the European settlers took over their land and prevented the spread of their beliefs. The tribes were commonly forced to forget their religious ways and customs. Many causes of death such as warfare, disease, and alcoholism lessened the Indian population. Because they had no written language, it is hard to know their exact beliefs and religious ways.