

Indians' lifestyles changed dramatically with their arrival: they were exposed to new and devastating diseases, new trade goods and commodities, new weapons and tools, new customs, and new prejudices—most of which had very destructive consequences for Native Americans. Permanent white farmers didn't move here in earnest until the early 1800s, after the land was acquired by the U.S.

### When did Native Americans leave West Bloomfield?

Native Americans were gradually pushed westward as white settlers began to flood into Michigan in the early 1800s. Although many local land treaties were negotiated between various Indian groups and the U.S. government, the most significant was the Treaty of Detroit, concluded on November 17, 1807—in which the Chippewa, Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Wyandot nations ceded their claim to southeastern Michigan. In the years after the treaty, the last remaining Native Americans were pushed out. While conducting his 1817 survey, Samuel Carpenter, Jr. came upon Native-American crops and houses around Orchard Lake, but his notes do not indicate that he encountered any people.

By 1817, they had been forced west.

### Native-American Agriculture

#### Arrival of Corn in Michigan

Considered the most important of all native crops, corn originated in Central America 7000 years ago, where it was carefully cultivated from a wild grass into the dietary staple we know today. Through complex networks of trade, the practice of growing corn (as well as beans and squash) reached Michigan perhaps 1500 years ago. Together, these three crops—known by the Iroquois as the Three Sisters—combined to create a nutritionally balanced meal packed with essential vitamins and minerals.

#### Legend of the Three Sisters

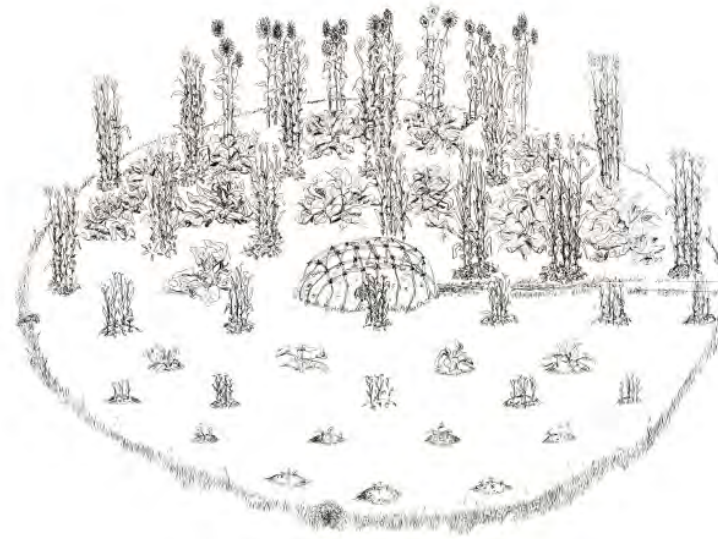
The Iroquois believed that the divine gifts of corn, beans, and squash were protected by three spirits called the Three Sisters, or De-o-ha'-ko, meaning “our life” or “our support.” Sown, reaped, and consumed together, corn,

beans, and squash also shared thanksgiving ceremonies: they were blessed in the spring, evoked in rain prayers in the summer, and celebrated in the fall.”

The Three-Sisters Garden: Companion Planting  
Nutritional benefits aside, when grown together, corn, beans, and squash are also beneficial to each other. Known as “companion planting,” this practice of intermixing crops creates a healthier garden while minimizing environmental impact. Cornstalks offer poles for beans to climb; corn leaves give squash shelter from the wind and sun; beans add nitrogen to the soil; and squash provide a ground cover of living mulch, shading the soil to help retain moisture and limit weeds. This efficient and intensive agricultural method meant that each family could subsist on about one acre of land.

#### Agriculture on Apple Island

Surveyor Samuel Carpenter, Jr. trekked through West Bloomfield in 1817 while charting Oakland County for the U.S. government. On Apple Island, he noted that five “high & excellent” acres had been cultivated by Native Americans. Of their crops, Carpenter only mentioned the presence of twenty or thirty apple trees. But in 1928 a daughter of Colin Campbell, who purchased Apple Island in 1856, recalled the following: “[On the island] are still to be seen ridges, where corn was planted, and in several places on the higher land are circular hollows, which were filled with shelled corn and all covered with bark to keep out the rain. This corn was still in the hollows when my father bought the Island . . . .”



“The Three Sisters are happy because they are home again from their summer in the fields.”

- Iroquois Harvest Song



Offered annually the 3<sup>rd</sup> Weekend in May



Artifacts found on Apple Island during the first archeological dig during the summer of 2000



Greater West Bloomfield  
Historical Society  
at the  
Orchard Lake Museum

3951 Orchard Lake Road  
Orchard Lake, Michigan 48323  
(corner of Orchard Lake and Long Lake roads)



## When did Native Americans arrive here?

The first people to live in Michigan (Paleo Indians) crossed the Bering Strait and arrived about 11,000 years ago. In the many centuries that followed, other Native-American groups came and went. About 1,600 years ago the most well-known groups began to arrive: the Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi, as well as the Wyandots, Hurons, Miami, Sauks, Foxes, Mascoutens, and some Iroquois bands.

## Who were these later groups of Native Americans?

There were so many different groups that we probably don't know them all. The biggest three were called the "People of the Three Fires": the Chippewa (also called the Ojibwe), Ottawa, and Potawatomi. Smaller nations included the Wyandots, Hurons, Miami, Sauks, Foxes, Mascoutens, and some bands of the Iroquois.

## How are these names pronounced?

- Chippewa: CHIP-uh-wah
- Ojibwe: Oh-JIB-way
- Wyandot: WHY-un-dot
- Ottawa: AH-toe-wah
- Mascouten: Mas-COO-tin
- Potawatomi: Pah-Toe-WAH-Toe-Mee
- Iroquois: EAR-ah-kwoi

## Why did Native Americans settle here?

For the same reason that we enjoy this area: the lakes, which provided food, water, and easy transportation. This area is also where the watersheds of the three local river systems (the Huron, Clinton, and Rouge) converge, which made it a convenient and well-known meeting place.



## What did early Native Americans look like?

Unfortunately, only archaeological evidence exists for Native American cultures before the arrival of Europeans, as these groups did not record information in written or graphic form. Post-European contact, however, there were many images of Native Americans created by whites—although by this time, Indian ways of life had been altered dramatically and bore only some resemblance to life pre-contact. Note that the Ottawa man below sports metallic jewelry and the woman wears a cloth dress, both evidence of the presence and influence of white settlers.



Ottawa man, circa 1725



Unidentified woman, circa 1770

## How did Native Americans live?



Recreation of a Huron wigwam

Although each nation had its own language, customs, and ways of life, there were some commonalities among them. Most of the groups that arrived circa 400 A.D. were hunter/gatherers and farmers. Men caught fish, rabbits, deer, moose, bear, and other game. Women cultivated crops like squash, beans, and corn. Local Native Americans lived in houses made of the materials right around them: bark, branches, hides, and mud. They made clothing and shoes from animal skins. And they made tools (such as those in the Orchard Lake Museum) from stone and animal bone.

## Where did Native Americans live in this area?



Samuel Carpenter, Jr's 1817 survey of West Bloomfield. Note the three "Indian huts" on the northeast corner of Orchard Lake, and the "Indian path" tracing the south shore of the lake before heading southeast.

Unfortunately, we generally don't know the exact locations where specific nations lived, or which nations settled in which areas, given that these groups lived in relatively close proximity and often migrated. The first U.S. survey of what would become our township was conducted in 1817 by Samuel Carpenter, Jr. He drew three "Indian huts" on the northeast corner of Orchard Lake, on the present-day site of Orchard Lake Schools, but he did not specify who built or lived in them. That area was never a reservation, as some have suggested, but rather a settlement, which disappeared with the arrival of white farmers.

## Did Native Americans live on Apple Island?

Yes, but it is not clear if these were permanent or only temporary settlements. Archaeological evidence from digs conducted by Cranbrook Institute of Science suggests that Native Americans were on Apple Island as early as 9000 B.C., and as late as the early 1800s. The types and durations of those settlements have yet to be determined, given the perishability of native building materials.



Silver tinkle cone and trading cross found on Apple Island during an archeological dig in 2000.

## Was Ottawa-Leader Pontiac ever on Apple Island?

Probably not. Although local legend has it that Pontiac planned his 1763 siege of Detroit from Apple Island, we have no evidence to suggest that is true. Likewise, although white islanders claimed that Pontiac was buried on Apple Island and even marked out his grave (naming it "Pontiac's Mound"), there is no proof for these imaginative stories. In fact, most historians agree that Pontiac's body was probably taken to St. Louis. However, Pontiac's nephew, Okemos, may have been born on Apple Island. Shortly before his death, he gave the following testimony in a Saginaw court: "I was born in Michigan near Pontiac, on an island in a lake . . ."

## What did it look like when Native Americans lived here?

The earliest surviving images of West Bloomfield Township were created by artist Edwin Whitefield in 1859, long after Native Americans had left and white farmers had begun pouring in. But Whitefield's sketch of Cass Lake, which illustrates the pristine naturalness of the land (although some agricultural clearing is visible in the background), gives some idea of what the township would have looked like before white settlement.



Edwin Whitefield's 1859 sketch of Cass Lake

## When did white settlers arrive?

White fur traders and Jesuit priests were in the Oakland-County area in the early 1600s. Although each group's reasons for being here were different, they lived and worked with Native Americans, adopting many of their customs, languages, and ways of life. Nevertheless, local