

IMAGES

. . . then and now

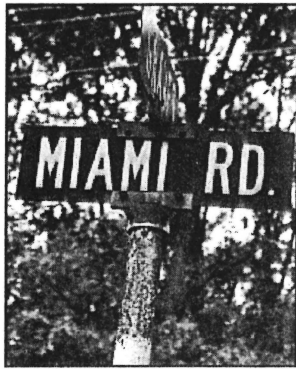
From The Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

Heritage of the Miami Indians

Bordered by the little Miami River on the east and with Miami Road as one of its main thoroughfares, Indian Hill recognizes the Miami Indians' importance in the history of the area. Miami University in Oxford, the neighboring village of Miamiville, and the nearby Miami Boat Club also bring to mind this tribe's presence in this corner of Ohio.



About 15,000 Miami inhabited portions of Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin in 1600. Intertribal warfare diminished their numbers in the 17th century and forced the smaller group to concentrate their settlements. Still the industrious Miami developed a rooted community and led a settled existence.

Miami maintained large villages where they carried on extensive agriculture, growing corn, melons, beans, squash, pumpkins and gourds. Their staple crop was corn, and in particular, a white variety, which produced a superior flour – better than other Midwestern woodland tribes. The women and children gathered fruits, berries, nuts, and medicinal plants, and the men hunted elk, bison, wildcat, deer, and bear—whose meat they traded to European missionaries who began arriving about 1650. Their lives centered around the seasons, with summer for gardening, fall for harvest, winter for hunting, and spring for reunions and inter and intra tribal matters.

Miami spiritual beliefs focused on the Great Hare, the sun and *manitous* (spirits) of animals or natural phenomenon. Individuals or the whole tribe prayed or made supplications to these *maintous* (e.g. thunder, snakes, the underwater panther) to secure good weather, safety, a bounteous hunt or harvest, or a successful war party. At ceremonies throughout the year, different spirits were worshipped. This cycle, though not fully documented, included a ceremony for the dead, for returning warriors, and for various crops.

Miami families had a strong sense of kinship, with extended family viewed as immediate family; and because of the high rate of mortality individuals commonly married three times. However, plural marriage was a sign of status. Children, who had a large group of close relatives, learned by emulating their elders and began early training for a vision quest, fasting for periods of increasing length, until at puberty each individual held an extended fast. There were several courtship traditions involving gifts to the bride's family. Tattooing was common amongst both sexes, and tattoos documented the major events in an individual's life. Burial rites were strictly followed, and mourning periods extended for a year.

Miami culture changed by the 1800s due to interaction with other tribes and newcomer Europeans. Trading with the French and British, they acquired cookware and guns, while giving up furs and surplus food (especially their soft white corn.) The Miami were allied with France until the British victory in the French and Indian War; and during the American Revolution, the Miami fought with the British against the Americans. After the Revolution the Miami continued to fight the colonists, resistant to white encroachment and aware that they had been manipulated. With their numbers depleted by European diseases, they witnessed the settlement of their hunting grounds and the diminishment of their land holdings.

Many Miami emigrated to Kansas or Oklahoma during the removals of the 1800s, but a small band remained in Indiana as a hidden community. Gradually they rebuilt their lives and over several generations revitalized the eastern remnant of the tribe. The proud group that once hunted in the area was a victim of history. Their former presence, sacrifices, advanced civilization, traditions, and rich folklore deserve recognition by current residents of southwestern Ohio.

