

The First People of Clinton County

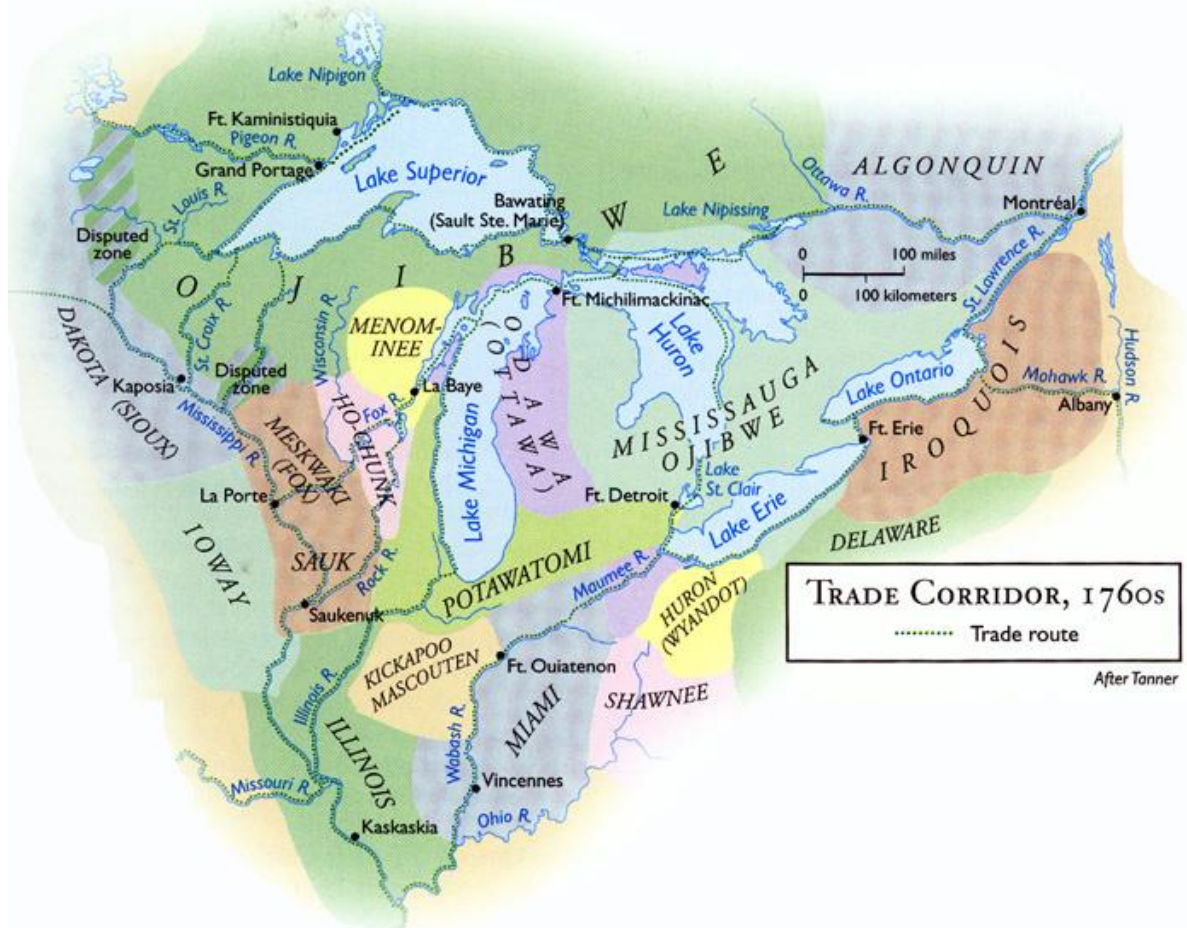
Be a Historian

How do we know what life was like in the past? Historians use primary and secondary sources. A primary source is one that was made at the time like a journal, map, or old photo. A secondary source was made later like a town or county history book.

First People

People have lived in Michigan for longer than anyone can remember. Before the French and British came here in the late 1600s and 1700s, Michigan was home to several tribes.

Michigan's three largest tribes are the Ojibwe (also called Chippewa), the Odawa (also called Ottawa) and the Potawatomi (also called the Bode'wadmi). They share similar languages, customs and beliefs. Together, they are called the Anishinaabe, or "original people." Hundreds of years ago, they created a partnership called the Three Fires.



When the first Europeans arrived in Clinton County, the people living here were the Ojibwe (Chippewa). The Ottawa were living just to the west and Potawatomi to the south. The Ojibwe lived here in small numbers mostly along the Looking Glass and Maple rivers. They traveled on the rivers by canoe and on land by foot along narrow trails. The main trail was the Northern Grand River Trail which crossed the center of Clinton County from Round Lake to Muskrat Lake and then Stony Creek. It continued on in both directions connecting Detroit to Lake Michigan.

The Ojibwe lived in wigwams. Wigwams were dome-shaped and covered with bark.



Everyone that lived in the village worked together. In warmer months, people hunted and fished, built canoes, wove fishing nets, and planted and harvested crops. In colder months, people moved around to find the food they needed. They hunted, fished and trapped animals. In the spring they harvested maple syrup and began planting crops.

Beaver, muskrat, raccoon, deer, and bear were hunted for meat and hides. Ojibwe gathered nuts, berries, wild rice and fruits. In the spring they planted corn, beans, squash, and pumpkin in open spaces. Women and girls took care of the gardens, cooking, and child care. Men and boys made tools, fished, and hunted.



Men wore leggings and breechcloths, and in winter shirts made of animal skins. Women wore skirts and jackets made of animal skins. Both wore moccasins. In cold weather they would use animal skins as blankets or robes.

The Ojibwe didn't speak English. They spoke Ojibwe which the other Three Brother tribes could also understand. Try saying *hello* in Ojibwe. Say Boozhoo (boo zhew).

They played games, sang songs, and told stories.

Family was important to the Ojibwe. Along with their parents, grandparents, and brothers and sisters, they also belonged to clans. The clan your father belonged to was your clan. People of the same clan only married people from other clans. Each clan was named for an animal that lived in their area.

We don't know which clans lived here, but they might have been:

Bear Clan – Makwa (mawk wah)

Beaver Clan – Amik (ah mick)

Wolf Clan – Mayiingan (mah ee guhn)

With the arrival of Europeans the life of the Ojibwe changed. The first to arrive were French traders who traded furs for guns and iron goods like knives and pots. However, soon settlers arrived wanting to own and farm the land. The government made treaties with the Ojibwe forcing them to move from Clinton County to reservations. This caused many hardships for the Ojibwe and their way of life.

[sources: Ziibiwing Center, Geography of Michigan and the Great Lakes Region Project, Michigan History for Kids (Summer 2008), The Ojibwe People's Dictionary]