

Milford Moments in Time

By Joyce M. Clark

According to the book *Ten Minutes Ahead of the Rest of the World, A History of Milford*, Elizur and Stanley Ruggles were attracted to the Milford area back in 1831 because of its flowing river. They were also smitten by the beauty of the land and so they staked their claim. However, both the local waterways and rich surrounding land were utilized by many people long before our pioneers settled the area.

Bill Schimmel, a local historian, indicates that the Chippewa Native American Indians were the third largest tribe in North America before the settlers arrived. The Chippewa Nation (also called Ojibwe) were part of an Algonquian body, including the Ottawa and Potawatomi Indians. During the late 1700's and early 1800's, all three nations resided in Michigan. Back then, the band of Saginaw Chippewa tribe ruled most of Michigan's Lower Peninsula including the Milford area.

The Chippewa family structure was similar to the settlers' home life. For example, the women farmed and did most of the child care and cooking. Men were hunters and sometimes went to war to protect their families. Both genders practiced story-telling, artwork and music.

The Chippewa home base, just like our earlier settlers, was along the Huron River. Milford's topography was nicknamed "Oak Savannahs" because the area was speckled with clumps of Oak trees surrounded by wide open spaces. The Chippewa created the open spaces through managed fires so they could farm crops (apples, corn, beans, and squash to name a few). The open space also helped cultivate the deer population which the Indians hunted as well.

In Milford, the area off of Rowe Road near Indian Garden Lake is believed to be a location the Chippewa frequented often, and may have been used as a home base. In 1863 the Ruggles family purchased the land and upon clearing it for farming, explains Dorothy Sheffler, a Ruggles descendent still living on part of the property, they often came across various Indian artifacts such as arrow heads and tools.

Locally, Bill explains, the Chippewa controlled the neighboring waters (i.e., Saginaw River, Tittabawassee River, Shiawassee River, Flint River, Huron River etc.) which acted as "highways" between the Great Lakes. Through these relatively fast canoeing channels, tribes could quickly travel throughout and across the state of Michigan.

But waterways were not the only means by which Native Americans traveled. According to the website *MichiganHighways.Org*, Native Americans also established footpaths connecting various settlements, hunting areas, and fishing locations. In the Milford area, Chippewa helped establish what was later termed

the "Grand River Trail" which is just one of several "Indian trails" to crisscross the Lower Peninsula . This trail evolved into Grand River Avenue . Pontiac Trail is an old Indian Trail connecting Pontiac to Saline, and White Lake Road is an old Indian Trail.

As the 1800's marched in, the local Indians became more and more concerned about the potential loss of their land to settlers. In the War of 1812, Chief Tecumseh, a dynamic leader of Ohio 's Shawnee Indian Tribe, motivated tribes across Michigan and Ohio to join the British in the hopes of keeping settlers from moving further west into Michigan and Ohio . Battles raged from Ohio to Wyandotte , Detroit , Windsor , and Chatham . And with most wars, there was suffering on both sides. In the end, the British lost, and Michigan was open to settlers.

After the War of 1812, local Indian Tribes were pressured into signing the 1819, 1821, and 1836 Treaties that relinquished any land rights. Following the War of 1812, the Indian Fighter Andrew Jackson ran on an Indian Removal platform while campaigning for president of the United States . The Indian Removal Act passed in 1830, at which point any Indians living East of the Mississippi were forced to move West, primarily to Oklahoma and Kansas . Many Saginaw Chippewa escaped North and to Canada to pre-empt this massive movement.

In 1825, the Erie Canal opened enabling many settlers to move into the Michigan and the Milford area. According to census reports in 1830, Detroit had 2200 residents and by 1850 (20 years later) there were over 21,000 residents. However, as Michigan 's settler population grew, by 1837 a smallpox epidemic decimated the Saginaw Chippewa killing almost 50% of their tribe.

As settlers moved into the Milford area, they enjoyed the same waterways and fertile land that numerous Native American generations had also enjoyed before the settlers' arrival. Some settlers found cornstalks and apple orchards already growing on their land.

On July 31, 1855, the United States government signed a treaty with these tribes which included giving each Ottawa and Chippewa Indian being the head of a family 80 acres of land, and to each single person over twenty-one years of age, 40 acres of land. In return, the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians released the United States from any liability regarding any former treaty stipulations. All of these land grants were located in the Isabella Reservation in Isabella County . This is now the home of the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe.

2007 is the 175th Anniversary of Milford and in celebration of this major milestone, we are asking you to share some of your stories with the rest of the community. If you have a little Milford history to pass along, please contact Sue Bullard, Milford Historical Society President, 248.685.7308 or milfordhistory@yahoo.com. The Milford Historical Society is happy to document your story and share it with others.



Caption: Dorothy Sheffler showcases Indian artifacts found on her family's Milford property near Indian Garden Lake off of Rowe Road .



GUARDING THE CORN FIELDS

Caption: Native American's (circa 1800) protect their crops from birds.



Caption: Chippewa Maple Sugar Camp (circa 1900)