



## “Bode wad mi” Potawatomi

The Potawatomi “Bode wad mi” are one of the three original tribes of Michigan. The Potawatomi “Bode wad mi” along with the Odawa/Ottawa and the Ojibwa/Chippewa are known as the people of the Three Fires. They call themselves Anishinabe. The Potawatomi “Bode wad mi” are the “Keepers of the Fire”.

On August 29, 1821, the *Bode wad mi*, Odawa and Ojibwa (“The People of the Three Fires”) held council with representatives of the United States government and signed a treaty, which left them only five reservations, and certain land grants in Michigan. Many were moved to Oklahoma and Kansas territories. Those who would not leave were driven out by military force or hid away from the government. Small bands traveled to Northeast Wisconsin, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and Canada.

All of the Anishinabe (*Bode wad mi*, Ojibwa and Odawa) lived in the eastern part of North America. After various wars and migrations, the tribes moved to the Great Lakes Area. The oldest brother, Chippewa (Ojibwa), was given the responsibility of Keeper of the Faith. The middle brother, Ottawa (Odawa), was the Keeper of the Trade, and the youngest brother, Potawatomi, was responsible for keeping the Sacred Fire; hence the name, “Keeper of the Fire.”

Long ago, the Potawatomi depended on nature to survive. They lived a nomadic life. They hunted, fished, grew crops and gathered food to eat. After they were forced onto reservations, they lived through years of poverty. At times during the early 1900s, they hardly had enough to eat.

The early Potawatomi people were a part of the Eastern Woodlands group of Native Americans. By many accounts, the people were fairly short with a stocky build. They were a fun-loving people who enjoyed practical jokes. Women were modest in both the clothes they wore and in their actions. The men and women both normally wore their hair long. During times of war, the men shaved their heads except for a small scalp lock on top. Women usually wore their hair in a single braid down their backs.

The Potawatomi’s love of nature and family was at the center of their way of life. This is evident throughout their early history, through their spiritual lives, and in all other areas of their village life such as their food, clothes, homes, tools, and transportation.

The Potawatomi people wore clothing that was very simple. During the summer, the men often wore clothes made out of red or blue cloth. In the winter some wore decorated buffalo robes. To keep warm during the winter, men wore leggings made of buckskin or cloth. They also wore these for special dances. When playing games like lacrosse, men wore breechcloths and deerskin moccasins.

After the hunters returned with the animals they had killed, the hides would be removed and then women would prepare the hides so that clothing could be made from them. Much of the Potawatomi clothing was made from these hides.

Women wore knee length dresses with petticoats underneath. They sometimes wore bonnets or scarves on their heads. They made their skirts and sleeveless dresses so that they draped over their shoulders and were held in place by a belt at their waist. If they needed to sew pieces together, they used thread made from plant fibers or strips of hide tied in place. These clothes were often decorated with different designs using porcupine quills or beads.

Men and women greased their hair and painted their skin for special occasions. Men tattooed their bodies with different designs.