



ODAWA

The Odawa/Ottawa are one of the three original tribes of Michigan. The Odawa/Ottawa along with the Potawatomi "Bode wad mi" and the Ojibwa/Chippewa are known as the people of the Three fires. They call themselves Anishinabe. The name Odawa/Ottawa comes from the word "adawe", which means to trade. The Odawa are the Traders in the Three fires.

Before the Europeans arrived, the Odawa traded with other tribes for items needed by the people of the Three Fires. Upon the arrival of the Europeans, the Odawa became the middle men between the French and other tribes. For 100 years the Odawa enjoyed and prospered trading with the French. It wasn't until the defeat of the French in the 1760s that the Odawa felt the wrath of the Europeans. The British felt the Odawa were inferior to them and treated them very harshly.

In the winter, the Odawa traveled to the Kalamazoo Valley to an area rich with furs. They set up temporary villages close to those of the Potawatomi. Some took Potawatomi spouses; bringing them to live in northern Michigan during the summer months. After crops were planted, the Odawa were free to travel. They would load up their canoes with gifts and visit kin all over the Great Lakes.

When forced in the nineteenth century, the Odawa started to receive education at missionary schools. The first resident priest was sent to present day Harbor Springs in 1831. By promising to give up their traditional beliefs the Odawa received a new church and supplies, such as nails, glass, tools, all to build a new town. Those that refused to give up their traditional ways were forbidden to practice them. The Odawa did benefit in food, technical assistance and education. They cared for orphans and provided charity during difficult economic times. In the early 1900s Americans began to outnumber the Anishinabe-Odawa in Harbor Springs. The Odawa built a new church in 1920. For over 60 years school was taught in the Odawa and English languages.

Things were not as good for those in the Grand River area, what is present day Grand Rapids. They did not receive the same support as their northern brothers.

When the Odawa decided to adopt American customs on their own terms they began to build permanent towns. Within a short time they learned carpentry, blacksmithing, and copper smithing. They were eager to work for a secure living. Their lives may have changed dramatically. The Odawa based their new way of life on their old customs. The Odawa served as a governing body. From the earliest treaties to present day, the Odawa political leaders have always strived to govern and care for their people.

Dress- Men wore only a robe and moccasins as a rule. For dress occasions they added a fitted, tanned-leather breechcloth with flaps in front and back. Women in ancient times wore a simple wraparound skirt of tanned leather, with a poncho-like garment, when needed for warmth. They welcomed European products, especially cloth, beads, metal and manufactured garments. Both men and women wore belts, shoulder bags, jewelry made of shell, bone, native copper, teeth and claws of animals. Both sexes pierced their ears in several places to insert feathers, beads or copper. The men wore nose rings.