

## **Huron River and the First Known Inhabitants**

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No written records exist of the first inhabitants of the Huron River and the surrounding area. However, we do know the location of its headwaters, which is located in Springfield Township, Oakland County, Michigan. From this location the Huron River can be traced southwest to Milford, Michigan.

Archaeologists and anthropologists working with artifacts and other scientific findings have painted a possible scenario that would have taken place about 9,000 years ago along the banks of the Huron River, beginning with the Paleo-Indian (hunters) later joined by migratory Indian tribes. The combination of these two groups would be called Aqua-Planos. A nineteenth century farmer, plowing his field in the Milford area, found discarded spearheads along the Huron River bank. These spearheads were used to confirm the existence of this particular group of Indians in that time period.

Six thousand years ago the Archaic Boreal Indians moved into the Great Lakes region to pursue hunting and fishing on the Huron River. This culture lasted approximately 2,500 years.

During both periods, climatic changes were taking place which started the process of evolution. This period would eliminate animals, game, fish, plant-life, and some tribes, making room for new growth in all aspects of this circle of life-form.

The Woodland Indian period began to take shape. Again, traces of their existence in the Milford area remains elusive.

However, the Wilbert B. Hinsdales' Archaeological Atlas of Michigan places Indian Villages in Oakland County at Walled Lake, Highland, Bald Eagle Lake, Rochester and along the Paint Creek, South Lyons, Lakeville, Kent Lake, Pontiac, Southfield and Grass Lake. Ancient burial grounds have been discovered in Pontiac, Birmingham, Walled Lake, and Novi Corners.

The arrival of French explorers in 1600 was greeted by descendants of the Woodland Indian tribes. These modern day Indians were known collectively as the "ANISHNABEG". They were composed of the Ojibway, elder brother, the Ottawa, next older brothers, and the Potawatomi, the younger brother. These three tribes were the "people of the place of the fire" This loosely organized group spoke similar dialects of the same Algonquian language and shared many cultural beliefs.

The "Anishnabeg" had adapted their lifestyles to this woodland area with its abundance of wildlife, rich soil, stately forest, transversed by rivers and lakes. An outstanding example of their use of local materials, and their craftsmanship is the birch bark canoe. The new arrivals would enjoy many foods that this group of Indians used in their daily lives, such as wild rice, maple syrup, and the "Three Sisters" (corn, beans, squash). The Potawatomies were very helpful to the "Che-mo-ko-man" in raising their wigwams (house).

The Huron River, so the story goes, had a low spot below the Ruggles Mill where Indians and early settlers crossed a huge log affording a good means of getting to the other side. It is believed that the name of Milford derived from this proximity of the fording place.

The sale of the eastern part of the state in 1807 caused a large emigration of Indian tribes from the Huron River and Detroit areas.

Eventually, the Indians were moved, placed on reservations, or perished from the introduction of diseases (ex. Smallpox) by these new arrivals, or became a part of the dominant culture.

However, the Indian Community has survived in Michigan. The 1990 Census of Oakland County listed 3,948 American Indians, which includes the Eskimo and Aleut Indian located in Oakland County.

Huron Valley Indian Education Program provides services for 170 students and their families located within the Huron Valley School District of Oakland County. Some of these families have been involved with the program since its inception. Other families of American Indian descent moved to the area for the same reason our forefathers did. They want to enjoy the beautiful, bountiful woodland area transversed by rivers and lakes that enhances their modern family lifestyle while retaining a closeness with Mother Earth and all that she has to offer.

*Peter's Mill, Milford. Historical photo courtesy of the Milford Historical Society*