

The Meskwaki Peoples of Iowa

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The Meskwaki people are a part of the Native American tribe, Sac & Fox of the Mississippi, located in Central Iowa. They are of Algonquian origin from the Eastern Woodland Culture areas. The tribe has been found in the St. Lawrence River Valley along the Canadian border, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa (Meskwaki, 2022). The Meskwaki people have a flag that signifies their culture and beliefs, and the flag is green and red. The green expresses the hope that spring will arrive, peace will prevail, and life will endure, and the red has the meaning telling that the reality is that fall will always follow, war constantly threatens, and death always comes (Tadubois, n.d.).

The history of war and removal made the tribe what it is today. After the Black Hawk War of 1832, the United States combined the two tribes, the Sauk and Meskwaki, under the name known now as Sac & Fox, for treaty-making purposes (Meskwaki, 2022). In 1845, the "Sac & Fox," the Sauk and Meskwaki, lost all lands and were removed to a reservation in east-central Kansas (Meskwaki, 2022). In 1857, the Meskwaki purchased their first 80 acres in Tama County, Iowa, which gave them the identity as the "Sac & Fox in Iowa. Over the next few decades, the tribe gradually returned to Iowa, leading to over 8,000 acres today.

The Meskwaki people have been located in many places throughout the Midwest over the centuries, eventually settling permanently in Iowa after many challenges with the government. In the past, the Meskwaki economy combined hunting, gathering, and agriculture and did not depend on one means or another (The Office of the State Archaeologist, n.d.). Popular foods for the tribe included corn, squash, beans, nuts, berries, and other fruits, along with the meat of hunted deer and buffalo (Tadubois, n.d.). They lived in a typical Northern U.S. climate, warm and muggy summers with cold and long winters. They lived in permanent villages next to lakes

or rivers in the summer. In the winter, they would move to a more isolated winter camp more profound in the forests, where they were more sheltered from predators and harsh winter weather (Tadubois, n.d.).

The characteristics of the Meskwaki relate to their physical environment by the way they lived in the past. War with Europeans and fights with the government made them who they were by not giving them a choice. They had to adapt to the best of their availability while also staying positive through it all. Today, their strength is shown in their built environment and the growth they keep achieving. The Meskwaki were masters at living off the land they were given; whether natural or forced, they used what they had to make the best life they could.

Today, the tribe has modified their environment to work to their advantage. They created an atmosphere that includes a school, health center, business center casino & hotel, newer housing, a bank, travel plaza, and the Natural Resources and Buffalo Wildlife Project (Meskwaki, 2022). The Meskwaki people are thriving today and taking back what once was theirs and are working to create a better community for their members through family service programs. They are committed to protecting their inherent sovereignty, preserving and promoting their culture, and improving the quality of life for future generations (Meskwaki, 2022).

A feature essential to the Meskwaki peoples is the powwows. The powwows are a necessary feature of the Meskwaki because it allows for expression through the traditional religious and social beliefs of the tribe (meskwakipowwow, 2022). Learning more about what is vital to the Meskwaki people will teach us about who they are, along with understanding why a powwow is essential.

Powwows in the Meskwaki tribe consist of multiple dances passed down from generation to generation. Artifacts associated with a Meskwaki powwow include elaborate outfits passed down from generation to generation (meskwakipowwow, 2022). A Friendship Dance is a universal dance among all nations to welcome visitors and guests to the host tribe. The dance expresses goodwill and friendship among humankind (meskwakipowwow, 2022). A solely for the Meskwaki is the Meskwaki Dance; it depicts their characteristics in times of peace and war when gathered with tribal groups (meskwakipowwow, 2022). Each piece is hand-created and tells us a story of both historical significance and creativity. The making of dance regalia is one of the most potent symbols of a dancer's Native identity (meskwakipowwow, 2022). For a men's traditional dance, movements represent a hunter/gatherer. Men wear breastplates made of bones to protect against arrows, chokers to protect against knives, or shields decorated with symbols representing their clan or tribe (meskwakipowwow, 2022).

Research methods used in the past to learn about this particular feature of the Meskwaki tribe might have included beginning with a research design, a plan for a research project and is intended to direct the execution of an archaeological investigation (Fagan & Durrani, 2020). The research design would include data collection; sites can be located and surveyed once funds are in place. Then, with powwows, interviews can be conducted of those in the area still part of the local tribe being researched.

Interviews would be an appropriate method to begin research. By interviewing those in the local tribe, an idea of the tribes' history can be built, and research can continue from there. Another method that can be used to research powwows includes methods that consist of searching for past artifacts. On the chosen site, photographing, surveying, measurements, or even

electronic devices could aid in the search for past artifacts to help support stories from the interviews (Fagan & Durrani, 2020). Aerial photography could be helpful with locating certain features of sites. Things that can be seen from aerial photography include shadow marks, slight variations in topography, and crop marks. A variation in crop growth sometimes suggests that there could be buried archaeological features (Fagan & Durrani, 2020). Past artifacts that may be found indicating a powwow may include pieces of powwow clothing or regalia. Specific details are worn during powwows, and these artifacts may leave behind other artifacts to be found, like beads or other small pieces.

Powwows can be held in public or private places, many welcome visitors and guests (meskwakipowwow, 2022). Powwows held by the Meskwaki are now public events and welcome all to attend. The powwow is held on the lands of the only Indian Settlement in Iowa (meskwakipowwow, 2022).

There is much to learn about powwows through the Meskwaki tribe. Telling the story of how powwows began for the Meskwaki will help create a larger picture of their importance to the tribe. The more we can learn about powwows, the more we can learn about this tribe and its history. Gathering more data is essential because it helps us understand the correct information. With more data, we can be sure that what we are learning about is accurate and true to the culture we are studying. Ethical implications that are at play while forming opinions about powwows could be certain stereotypes we may have heard before. We want to make sure we are gentle and kind with our research, asking the correct questions, and not assuming certain things about the culture.

Based on artifacts found, they may tell a bit about powwows. From the regalia, it would seem that the purpose of the clothing would have included something important. In the past, powwows were seen as a religious event, but the modern powwow is derived from the "Green Corn Dance," an annual event during the harvest of crops (Alex, 2000). Other artifacts that may be found would correlate with this dance, like dried corn or other fresh crops, along with evidence of certain ball games, which they played after dancing and feasting.

Connections between powwows and the economic culture of the Meskwaki people allow the continuation of their beliefs from the past. Powwows are a way for the Meskwaki to connect with their ancestors and a way for them to have social gathers with historical connections. Social culture has many links to powwows. Powwows are a celebration, a social gathering of the tribe, and are still held on traditional grounds (meskwakipowwow, 2022). The powwow is used as an annual gathering to honor history through dancing, singing, and feasting. It is also a time to look forward and envision a better future (iowaculture, 1998). Along with social culture, powwows are part of religious culture from origins in the past. The Meskwakis powwow is a time of reaffirmation and hope, a time of worship and kinship, and is a time of friendship and making new acquaintances (Alex, 2000).

I want to think this research would make the Meskwaki proud and positively impact them. By learning more about who they are and their past, we can all understand one another a bit better than we did before. It is essential to know the history of those who lived here before us and what made them today. I only hope that things continue to be better for the tribe; they deserve so much more than they have been given.

Resources:

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