

# **Tippecanoe County Historical Association**

Lafayette, IN, [www.tippecanoehistory.org](http://www.tippecanoehistory.org)

## **Fort Ouiatenon and Feast of the Hunters' Moon School Guide**

This guide is intended as a resource for teachers and educators who plan to visit and study the history of Fort Ouiatenon and The Feast of the Hunters' Moon, located in West Lafayette, Tippecanoe County Indiana.

### **Contents**

Vocabulary (including French Words) .....	2
The North American Fur Trade .....	3
The Beaver .....	5
Fort Ouiatenon .....	6
The Voyageur .....	8
Coureurs de Bois .....	10
The Wea .....	11
Habitants.....	13
French Military .....	13
The British.....	14
The Feast of the Hunters' Moon .....	14
Discussion Questions.....	15

# Vocabulary (including French Words)

**Duvet** – (do-vay) wooly undercoat of an animal's fur

**Pelt** – (pelt) the skin of a fur-bearing animal.

**Castor Gras** – (caster gra) French words that name the pelts worn by an Indian as clothing, where the fur's guard hairs were already worn off.

**Voyageurs** – (voy-a-jer) a traveler. This is French word that has been taken into the English language to mean one of the men who paddled the canoes and carried the pack in the North American Fur Trade.

**Palisade** – (pal-a-sayd) a fence made of poles (or pales) driven into the ground.

**Stockade** – (stock-ade) a tall fence made of wooden post driving into the ground side by side to keep out enemies.

**Garrison** – (gar-i-son) a group of troops stationed at a military post.

**Confederation** – (con-fed-er-a-tion) a group of allies that act together for reasons such as defense.

**Archaeological Excavation** – a hole that has been made by digging in order to look for clues buried in the ground that were left by people who lived long ago.

**Traverse** – (tra-verse) a crossing. The Voyageurs used this word for the crossing of a wide, open stretch of water.

**Portage** – (port-age) to carry. This is a French word that has been taken into the English language. In the fur trade it was used in two ways. One meaning is the act of carrying goods and canoes over land from one stretch of water to another. It also means the trail over which the men carry

their loads. A long trail was called a grand portage.

**Posé** – (poz-a) to put something down. For the Voyageur, this work meant putting down his burden when he was crossing a portage, and going back for another load.

**Packs** - contained furs or trade goods. They weighed about 90 lbs each. Each Voyageur was responsible for 6 packs or *pièces*.

**Navigable** – water that is passable by ship or boat, especially deep enough and wide enough to allow boats to sail through.

**Chanteur** – (chant-er) A French word meaning, singer or chanter.

**Coureurs de Bois** – (cur-air-ss-du-bwa) Meaning “runners of the woods.” They were the woodsman, trappers and fur traders who often accompanied the Voyageurs.

**Wigwams** – A type of round-shaped house built by Native Americans.

**Habitants** – (haby-tants) A farmer of French descent living in Canada or the United States.

**Ouiatenon** – (We-a-ta- non). A word made up by the French fur traders to describe the land (and later Fort) located in the area inhabited by Wea Indians.

**Missionaries** - People who are sent to a foreign country to do religious work (such as to convince people to join a religion or to help people who are sick, poor, etc.)

## Canoe Vocabulary

**Bow** - the front part of the canoe

**Prow** - another word for the front part of the canoe

**Stern** - the back part of the canoe

**Steer** - to guide

Other Events and Terms it might be helpful to know:

French and Indian War (1754-63)

Pontiac's Uprising (1763)

Revolutionary War (1775- 1783)

George Rogers Clark (born 1752- died 1818)

National Register of Historic Places

## The North American Fur Trade

In the early 1600's men sailed from France to the valley of the St. Lawrence River (eastern Canada) to explore. The French explorers made diaries, maps, and pictures of what they saw.

The French explored farther and farther inland using the connecting lakes and rivers. The earliest accounts of Indians in the Great Lakes region was in the 1630s from the French Jesuit missionaries. They wanted the Indians to become a part of French culture and to be part of the French Empire in the New World. The Native American tribes that the missionaries and other explorers encountered all wore clothes made of furs or skins. The French recognized these furs as being valuable. They began trading blankets, jewelry, knives, kettles, and guns for the Indians' furs.



Artifacts from Fort Ouiatenon

The French sailed back to France and sold the skins. People in European countries wanted the skins for warmth and the beaver pelts for hats.

Many more French fur traders came to the St. Lawrence Valley, founding settlements in Quebec and Montreal. They traveled from their settlements to the Indian villages, and continued to travel farther in birch-bark canoes using the network of lakes and rivers. They built log trading posts, called *Forts*, where the Indians came to bring furs and trade them for goods. Companies were formed in Canada with warehouses to hold the furs coming in and trade goods going out.

Early contact and cooperation between the French and the Indians led to rocky relations between the British and Indians. Only after the British defeat of the French in the French and Indian war in 1763, were the British able to actively participate in the fur trade with the Indians in the northwest. The British continued an open fur trade and introduced whiskey as a central good in the trade. Alcohol proved to become a problem among many Indians.

In 1783, the peace treaty ending the American Revolution was signed, which gave all the British territories to the new American government. This treaty also

declared the entire Indian population wards of the American government. The Tribal governments were recognized and Indian land ownership was acknowledged throughout the Northwest Territory. Slowly the fur trade came to an end. The trade worked only when Indians had control of the land. Furs were also becoming increasingly hard to find because the animals had been over hunted. As a result of westward expansion and Indian relocation, there were fewer Indians available to assist in trapping and working the trade. Finally, there was a change in fashion. The silk hat became popular in Europe and the fur hat had gone out of style.

The Russian and Baltic fur sources had depleted by the sixteenth century. However, the French Canadian market held strong. In the early years of the North American Fur trade there was often a profit of 1000%-2000% because of unfair negotiations with the native tribes. There was a three to six year lapse between investment and return because there was such a large distance to travel and the journey was very difficult.

A pelt is the skin of a fur-bearing animal. Pelts traded in the North American Fur Trade were: beaver, mink, marten, fisher, otter, ermine, fox, lynx, bear, wolf, deer, moose, buffalo, swan, geese.

The European demand for furs remained strong and the demand from Native American tribes for manufactured goods grew stronger as time went on and dependency on these items grew. From Europeans, the Native Americans received firearms, blankets, cloth, kettles, metal tools, mirrors, glass beads, scissors and sewing needles. These items greatly

changed the Native American way of life and daily comfort level.

When Native Americans used bows and arrows to hunt game, the animals were not over hunted. After the introduction of commercial goods, such as steel leg traps, things changed. Instead of taking one or two beavers from a lodge, hunters would trap the whole colony to use their pelts in the Fur Trade.

The French Fur Trade stretched across almost half the continent from the Rockies to the mouth of the Mississippi. Forts, such as Fort Ouiatenon were established to support the fur trade, to keep the British from claiming land west of the eastern colonies, and for missionary purposes. The French and British had been fighting for the land, now called New France, for a hundred years. Fort Ouiatenon was not an exception to this fight. The Fort changed hands between the French and the British several times.



# The Beaver

The beaver was the most important pelt in the North American Fur Trade.

The beaver is a rodent with large, webbed back feet that the animal uses to swim. The beaver has four sharp, curved front teeth which constantly grow. These teeth are used to chew down trees for food and the beaver can chew down a four-inch tree in two minutes. The beaver eats the soft bark of trees like the willow, birch and cottonwood as well as grass roots and plants that grow in the water. Beavers also use the logs and branches to build their home.

The beaver was sought in the North American Fur Trade for its unique hair. It has two kinds of fur. There is a warm wooly undercoat or *duvet*. This coat is minutely barbed and helps the animal trap a layer of air against its body for warmth. This is especially useful in the cold water. The top layer consists of long silky guard hairs.

The pelts worn by an Indian as clothing were called *castor gras*. These were most in demand by the French traders because the guard hairs were already worn off.

## Commercial use of the beaver pelt

Beaver furs could easily be destroyed by maggots, moths, and mold, so they had to be cleaned and dried, or cured. Pelts were washed, scraped, and then stretched. This was done by the Native Americans before they were traded to the Europeans.

When the furs reached Europe, they were ready to be processed. First, the guard hairs were removed from the fur and the woolly undercoat was scraped off the pelt. The hair was then chopped up and mixed with cheaper cat or rabbit hair. The barbed undercoat hairs served to bind the whole mixture together for quality and strength. The fur was then molded into a top hat, tricorne, or flat shaped hat and stiffened with shellac.



## Fort Ouiatenon

Fort Ouiatenon was the first fortified European settlement in what is now Indiana. It was established by the French in 1717 as a military outpost to prevent British expansion into the Ohio and Wabash country. It was located at a site five miles southwest of what is today the city of West Lafayette.



Painting by E. Barlow imagining what Fort Ouiatenon looked like in 1752.

As buffalo, beaver, and other fur-bearing animals were abundant in the area, the fort served as a trading post and stopping point for the voyageurs from Quebec. The French were also interested in converting the Native Americans to Catholicism. Fort Ouiatenon's establishment was based on defensive strategy, the quest for wealth, and missionary zeal.

One of the reasons the French selected the site for Fort Ouiatenon was because just across the Wabash River was a large Wea Indian village. The Weas were a part of the Miami tribes who had settled in five villages on the banks of the Wabash below the mouth of the Tippecanoe River. Their location was the gateway to the western prairies for various other tribes including the Kickapoos, Mascoutens, Sauk, and Fox. The Weas had been quick to establish trade relations with the French so the riches of the prairies and the forests flowed easily from Ouiatenon to Quebec and to France.

Between 1720 and 1760 the settlement at Fort Ouiatenon prospered and grew. Every year, French voyageurs came down the

Wabash River to trade their goods for furs trapped by the Native people. Some remained there to establish homes.

An early visitor described Fort Ouiatenon as "the finest palisaded fort in the upper country, consisting of a stockade and a double row of houses." Within the stockade, there was a double row of ten houses, a chapel, a blacksmith's shop, and trading areas. Around the walls of the fort were as many as 90 houses of French, Natives, and mix-bloods. At its height there may have been as many as 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants in the general area.

Among those inhabitants was Anthony Foucher, born at Fort Ouiatenon in 1741, who became the first priest born in the present state of Indiana. At Fort Ouiatenon in these years there was generally harmony between the French and the Native Americans. The French regularly presented gifts to the Natives to insure their loyalty, and the Natives in turn brought their pelts only to the French.

This peaceful era continued until the French and Indian War (1754-63). As a result of this war, the French lost all of their North American lands to the British, including Fort Ouiatenon. The Fort was taken for Britain by Lieutenant Edward Jenkins and a garrison of troops from Detroit, Michigan in 1761.

Although Jenkins and his men maintained friendly relations with the Natives, the tribes in the Great Lakes region and the Wabash country did not like the growing numbers of white men moving west. The Native American tribes were upset that the British did not continue the French custom of presenting gifts and that British traders were demanding higher prices for goods.

In early 1763 the Ottawa Chief Pontiac set out to drive the Europeans back behind the

Appalachian Mountains. His confederation of tribes attacked 12 frontier posts and successfully captured eight of them, including Fort Ouiatenon, which fell without a shot on June 1, 1763, when a group of braves simply walked in and took Lieutenant Jenkins and his few men as prisoners. Thanks to the intervention of two French fur traders who lived at the post, Jenkins and his men were not killed but were later released in an exchange of prisoners at Detroit.

“Pontiac's Uprising” came to an end as a result of a meeting at Fort Ouiatenon. Colonel George Croghan, deputy supervisor of Native affairs for the English colonies of America, was captured by Natives and brought to Fort Ouiatenon. He met with Pontiac in the late summer of 1765, where he suggested that the Indians and whites sign a peace treaty to end the uprising.

After “Pontiac's Uprising,” Fort Ouiatenon was not re-garrisoned. It remained a small French trading and trapping settlement as well as a large Native community. In 1778, just 12 households remained at the post, although the nearby Wea village was believed by the British Governor of Vincennes to have “1,000 braves capable of bearing arms”.

A British agent occupied the post briefly to spy on the Americans in 1778. He abandoned the fort to George Rogers Clark's men, under the command of Captain Leonard Helm. Helm got pledges of loyalty to the American cause from the residents and then rejoined Clark at Vincennes.

The next visitor to Fort Ouiatenon was British Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton who, in 1778, was traveling from Detroit with plans to recapture Vincennes from Clark and the Americans. He described the fort as “a miserable stockade surrounding a dozen miserable cabins, called houses. The Natives hereabouts are numerous, there appear 96 of their cabins, which allowing

five men to a house make the number 480.” Hamilton scolded the occupants for turning to the Americans and made further preparations for his attack on Vincennes. Three months later, Hamilton was captured by Clark in one of the more surprising British defeats of the Revolutionary War.

For a while after the American Revolution, Fort Ouiatenon remained a settlement for a small number of French inhabitants and was a popular meeting place for local tribes. The Natives, however, realizing that the flow of white settlers from the east would not halt, began to use Fort Ouiatenon as a staging ground for raids on Kentucky settlers. In 1786, the inhabitants of Fort Ouiatenon were forced to leave the post for fear of their lives.

Finally, in 1791, President George Washington ordered the destruction of the Wabash Native villages. This command was carried out by General Charles Scott who burned all crops and houses, bringing the era of Fort Ouiatenon to an end.

Fort Ouiatenon lay in ruins when white settlement began to grow in its neighborhood in the 1820s. Its existence was slowly forgotten until even its exact location was no longer known.

In the late 19th century, local history buffs began to take a renewed interest in Ouiatenon. In 1930 the present blockhouse at Fort Ouiatenon Historical Park was constructed by a local physician, Dr. Richard B. Wetherill.

In 1968 archaeological excavations and document research began under the direction of the Tippecanoe County Historical Association to recapture and preserve the almost-forgotten French Heritage of Fort Ouiatenon. The archaeological excavation uncovered the actual site of the original stockade approximately one mile downriver from the blockhouse. Excavations, under the

supervision of archaeologists from Michigan State University, ended in 1979. The actual site of Fort Ouiatenon was placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1970.

Both the document research, which has extended as far as Canada and France, and the archaeological research are adding to our knowledge of Fort Ouiatenon of more than two centuries past.



## The Voyageur

**Voyageur** - a traveler. This is a French word that has been taken into the English language to mean one of the men who paddled the canoes and carried the packs in the Fur Trade.

Voyageurs were hired to take goods to the Forts in "Indian country" in the spring and return to Montreal, Canada in the fall with loads of furs. The voyageurs traveled in canoes made of birch-bark using the lakes and rivers to move south and west.



Voyageurs at the Feast of the Hunters' Moon

The voyageurs were a special class of people with their own clothes, food, customs, and way of life.

Voyageurs were not very tall, maybe just five feet tall. Short men were hired because their legs would take up less space in the canoe, leaving more room for valuable cargo. They were, however, very strong. Voyageurs needed to be able to carry a weight of 180 lbs. and paddle heavy canoes fast for two to three hours.

The Voyageurs learned from the Indians how to build the canoe. It is a long narrow boat with sharp-pointed ends. The canoe is made from materials found in the northern forest. The outer covering is made of birch bark. The inside frame is built out of cedar strips. Each end of the bark is cut into a high curve. The ends are sewn with roots called watap (*wah'-top*), which come from the spruce tree. This is an Indian word. The roots are also used to sew the top edge of bark to the frame. The seams are covered with gum from a pine tree, heated, spread over the seams, cooled and hardened to become waterproof.

Canoes are often painted red, green and black with a star or bear on the bow. [[why?](#)] There were three sizes of canoe used in the fur trade: "Montreal" was the largest. It measured up to 40 feet long and held 5 tons, carrying 8 to 14 men. The next size was 30 feet long and five or six feet wide. The smallest was 25 feet long and paddled by 3 to 5 men.

### Voyageur Canoe Positions

**Bowsman** - in the front. He is the guide.  
**Steersman** - at the stern. The steersman always stood.

**Middlemen** - the paddlers between the bowsman and the steersman.

### **Paddle sizes**

Middlemen used a paddle about 2 feet long and three inches wide.

The Steersman's paddle was longer and wider.

When going through rapids the bowsman used a longer blade.

Paddles were made of cedar wood and painted red.

### **Supplies**

The Voyageurs carried supplies besides food and cargo such as extra paddles, bark patches, watap and gum, a big sponge to bail out water, a long rope and a big oilcloth.

### **Trade Goods**

The Voyageurs brought trade goods with them such as: glass beads, kettles, guns, trade silver, tools, fish hooks, brandy, tobacco, blankets, and cloth.

### **The Trip**

In the spring the voyageurs began preparing for the trip inland by gathering bundles of trade goods and checking the boats. They wrapped the goods in canvas, leaving two ears for handles. Each bundle weighed about 90 pounds. They laid poles in the bottom of the boat and then laid the packets on the poles with places left for the paddlers to sit. It took a minimum of two months to paddle from Montreal, Canada to Fort Ouiatenon.

Voyageurs worked sixteen to eighteen hour days. They often had to be immersed in icy waters and carried heavy loads. Every two hours they took a break from paddling.

They ate two meals a day, often eating the same thing—a thick soup made from dried corn or peas with a little pork.

Voyageurs sang as they paddled to drive away homesickness and to help them paddle, keeping time with the music. The *chanteur*, or singer was one of the most important people on the canoe and got extra pay. When the wind was at their backs, they

set up a pole with the oil cloth and made a sail.

At night they would carry the canoes on shore and turn them over to inspect for cracks and weak spots. They would then patch and gum the seams. Next was a supper of thick soup. If they had energy left they would dance and sing and smoke a pipe. They slept underneath the canoes.

In the morning the cook woke up first to make breakfast, which would be eaten after a few hours of paddling. He would wake everyone early and they would set up the canoes and cargo in the water and get started on another day.

Voyageurs usually stayed close to shore, but it was not always possible. They often had to make a *traverse*—meaning crossing a wide stretch of water. Here the boats were far from land and the water was deep. If the day was clear, all would be well. If the day was stormy the waves might break the canoe, sending the men and the cargo into the deep, icy water.

Rapids were also dangerous. Rapids are where the river water flows fast over rocks making the water rough and foamy. This was one of the most exciting and *tiring* parts of the journey. First the bowsman would hear the roar of the water splashing over the rocks. Next he would see the spray ahead. They would stop the boat and send a guide ahead to judge if the rapids were navigable. If they were, they would “shoot” the rapids, staying in the boat as it was swept along the current. The bowsman would watch for rocks to know when to turn quickly to the right or left. If a man’s paddle broke, he would have to replace it with speed so as not to miss a stroke. If the canoe smashed against a rock, the men were thrown into the cold water and the cargo would be washed downstream.

If the rapids were determined not to be navigable, a long rope was tied to the

canoe. Some of the Voyageurs got out and pulled the canoe while walking on shore. Two other Voyageurs would wade in the cold water to guide the canoe.

The portage was the hardest work the Voyageurs did. When lakes or rivers were not connected, they had to portage, or carry the canoes and cargo over a stretch of land to the next body of water. When they came to shore they jumped out into the water and unloaded the boats. Then two men lifted the canoe out of the water and took it to land where they turned it over so the bottom didn't get scratched. The largest of the canoes (up to 40 feet long and weighing 600 lbs) were portaged by four men who carried it upside down on padded shoulders. Two men were at the bow and 2 at the stern. The packs of furs or trade goods could weigh 90 pounds each. Each Voyageur was responsible for six packs. These were carried in three loads. They were carried by putting one pack in a leather string and looping it around the

forehead. A second pack was then thrown on top. The Voyageur ran at a fast trot leaning forward to balance the load. After half a mile they would posé, or put down the load, and go for the next load. After all three loads were at the half mile point they would go another half mile and posé again. The Voyageur would have to walk 5 miles for every mile portaged. The average speed for a man portaging was 3 miles per hour. Including time for loading and unloading a one mile portage would take about 2 hours.

### Approaching the Fort

The Voyageurs arrived at the Fort in the summer. They wanted to look their best when they arrive at the Fort, so they would stop a few hours before arrival and wash, shave, comb their hair, put on a clean shirt, a bright sash around the waist , their best pants, and new moccasins. As they approached the Fort they would sing and shout loudly to announce their presence. There was a big welcoming. Their arrival was much anticipated at the Fort.

## Coureurs de Bois

Meaning "runners of the woods" or "woodsmen" They were the woodsmen, trappers and fur traders often accompanying the Voyageurs. The trade expanded from the great lakes and Hudson Bay area and the traders began to push inland on the connecting rivers and lakes. In the early years of the North American Fur Trade, the Indians were encouraged to bring furs down to the great fur fair on the Island of Montreal. More often, a *courieur de bois* would take his load of trade goods by canoe out to the Indians where he lived for the winter and returned in the spring

with a cargo of furs. As beaver populations decreased and the trade pushed further inland, the *courieurs de bois* would travel with the voyageurs to trade and hunt.



## The Wea

The Wea are commonly known as a sub-tribe of the Miami. The word "Wea" is probably a contraction of the local name *Wawaagtenang*, 'place of the round, or curved, channel'.



The Wea originally lived on Greenbay Island on the west side of Lake Michigan in Wisconsin, and

around what is now Detroit, Michigan. As the Iroquois were being pushed further west, there were land struggles between tribes. This forced the Wea to move to what is now the Chicago area and then to Indiana (prior to 1700) in the Wabash River Valley. In Indiana, they had five villages in all; one was at Ouiatenon/ Wea Plains near the Wabash River. After 1719, their chief village in Indiana was Ouiatenon. Due to its location near the Wea village, Fort Ouiatenon was one of the principal headquarters of the French traders.

The organization of the tribal villages was simple, but similar to the structure of our city's and governments today. There were several Chiefs to a village. Each had their own role and duties to follow. The village Elder Women were behind the men and checked or changed the decisions the men made. The children were the responsibility of everyone in the village to discipline and educate.

The Wea lived near fields where they raised corn, pumpkins, melons, beans and squash in the summer. They fished in the local streams and rivers and hunted in a large area that they shared with neighboring Native American Bands. In the winter, they moved to smaller settlements and lived in smaller homes or wigwams. They trapped animals for meat and in the early spring tapped maple trees for syrup.

The Wea were known for being quiet and well spoken. They were also known for wearing very fancy, flashy clothing. A young Wea man might spend much of the day decorating his body and dressing in festive clothing to celebrate a special event and to show his wealth to his neighbors. Feathers were symbols and decorations of war, worship, social customs and social status. The most striking feathers were connected with social status. The downy feathers of a bird, especially the eagle or hawk, were considered a bridge between the spirit world and our world.

The Spiritual Leader and Tribal Priest were responsible for religious ceremonies of the Tribe, consulting the Great Spirit on war, hunting, sickness, and more. Often offerings of tobacco, food, adornment, animals, and clothing were made to the spirits in order to acquire some desired thing. They believed that everything put on this earth by the Creator had soul and was alive. Everything was sacred and needed to be respected.

Hunting was never a sport and only animals needed for food and clothing were taken. Before killing, they asked the animal for its life. If the animal gave consent, it was killed and thanked for giving its life. Plants were gathered from a variety of sources. The Native Americans never took all the plants from one area, allowing some to remain to replenish the supply for the next year. The Creator was thanked for the gift of the animals and plants.

Feasts were held to celebrate the birth of a child, the sharing of an important dream, or war and hunting victories. The person holding the feast had two people who sung with them before and during the feast. After the feast, they sung by themselves and the helpers were painted red.

Warriors never went into battle without having painted their face. Some painted

with black or blue, other with red or yellow, some with brown. The color, style and symbols used were personal with no two alike.

The Warriors Pouch, or Medicine Pouch, was made of animal skins, usually rare skins or skins of importance to the person wearing them. Owls, snakes, white swans, perroquets and magpies were considered some of the rarest animal skins. Roots, powders, or herbs were carried in the pouches and served as medicines. The Medicine Pouches and their contents were considered sacred and regarded with respect, and still are today.

Warriors always fasted before a feast, not eating or drinking before they had a vision or dream. They would blacken their faces, shoulders, and breasts with coal and wait until they had received a vision to have the feast. Dreams carried great significance. The dreams that came from the spirits or the Creator were believed to be extremely important and had to be interpreted and taken seriously. Dreams had the ability to determine a person's tribal social status.

It was the custom for both Wea men and women to tattoo and pierce their faces.

During the early 1700s the Wea first had contact with the French. In 1717 the French built a trading post, missionary, garrison, and a blacksmith shop.

Fort Ouiatenon was across the Wabash River from the Wea village. The French carefully chose the close location to their trading partners and allies, the Wea. The French and Native Americans became dependent upon each other over a period of time. Many of the French men who came to Fort Ouiatenon took Wea women as wives.

As the fur trade around Fort Ouiatenon grew, other native groups moved to the area

such as the Kickapoos, Mascoutens, Potawatomis, Piankeshaws and Wyandots. Native Americans had traded among themselves before the arrival of Europeans. Native Americans of the Great Lakes region traded furs from animals they trapped to other tribes and eventually the furs reached the Fort. Some tribes were known as trappers and some as traders. The Wea prepared furs for trade by cleaning them.

The Wea and the other tribes at Fort Ouiatenon had very friendly relations with the French. At the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, the Fort became the property of Great Britain. Relations between the British and Native Americans were not as friendly and often strained.

In 1791, President George Washington ordered the destruction of the Wabash Native villages. This command was carried out by General Charles Scott who burned all crops and houses, bringing the era of Fort Ouiatenon to an end. The Wea participated in the treaty of Greenville, Ohio, Aug. 3, 1795, their deputies signing for them and the Piankashaw people.

The Wea were removed from Indiana as part of the Indian Removal Acts. Removal began in 1820 when the Wea sold their last lands in Indiana and removed, with the Piankashaw, to Illinois and Missouri. When forced removal came again in 1836-1846, the Native Americans were transported to Kansas. Of the 350 people forced to make the trip, 150 died of starvation, disease, and broken hearts. In the Treaty of 1854 they joined together with the Peoria, Kaskaskia, and Piankeshaw as the Confederated Peoria Tribes, known today as the Peoria Indian Tribe of Oklahoma. After 1854 the U.S. Government considered the Wea eradicated.

## Habitants

French settlers came to the Fort Ouiatenon area to trade and to serve as craftspeople and artisans to promote the growth of the post. Many were voyageurs who had decided to settle or just to winter, but many others were traders. Around the walls of the fort were as many as 90 houses of French and Natives. At its height there may have been as many as 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants in the general area. The most important craftsman to the Indians was the blacksmith. In 1715, the Indians specifically requested "an officer to govern them, a missionary to instruct

them, and a blacksmith." Blacksmith Jean Richard was sent to Fort Ouiatenon and like many inhabitants of Fort Ouiatenon, he took an Indian wife. Some habitants brought their families with them.



## French Military

The French military at Fort Ouiatenon were most likely members of the Compagnies Franches de la Marine, or French Canadian Navy. They came to help keep the peace at this rough frontier outpost wearing impressive uniforms of grey and blue. Charles Renaud Dubuisson was the first to be in command at Fort Ouiatenon, but was later sent to Miami (Fort Wayne). Vincennes (the younger) was in command of the military under orders of Dubuisson. Francois de l'Eperanche de Villemure was another commandant at Fort Ouiateneon. He was assigned to govern Fort Ouiatenon during the French and Indian War. Fort Ouiatenon saw military action during the French and Indian War, Pontiac's Uprising and the American settlement period.

The military presence at Fort Ouiatenon was never large, with only ten or twenty

men. However, when food was in short supply in the north, fifty more troops were sent to Fort Ouiatenon because it had a better food supply thanks to cooperation with the Wea.

The provisions for the French troops were basic rations of bread, salt pork, and dried peas. Fresh beef could be purchased and vegetable gardens were planted. Wild game was hunted to add variety to their diet. During the French and Indian War, when provisions were tight, horsemeat was used instead of pork. Their pay was small and the officers had to buy their own food.



## The British

As the victors in the French and Indian War, the British laid claim to the former



French empire in America in 1760. British soldiers did not arrive at Fort Ouiatenon until October 1761. Even as an official British post, Fort Ouiatenon was relatively unchanged because

many of the French traders remained to continue the fur trade. The British installed only a small garrison, and even that limited presence was short lived. Native allies of Pontiac captured the post in 1763. The Indians spared the lives of the British soldiers, but forced them to leave the post.

Although Fort Ouiatenon officially remained British territory until the American Revolution, no soldiers were reassigned there after 1763, and the official British presence was that of a single representative. In 1778, British troops, commanded by Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton, camped near Fort Ouiatenon on their way to Vincennes. While at Fort Ouiatenon the British held artillery practice, negotiated with the natives, and hosted a hog roast for their native allies. After Clark's defeat of the British and capture of Hamilton, Fort Ouiatenon became American territory, but, with the exception of some of Clark's troops, was never occupied formally by American forces.

## The Feast of the Hunters' Moon

The Feast of the Hunters' Moon is a recreation of the celebration that occurred in the fall when the



Voyageurs landed, bringing fresh goods from Canada. Neighboring Indian villages, traders, habitants, and the military would all come together to celebrate, exchange stories and goods. There would be feasting, involving

foods from the many different cultures. There would be singing and dancing mixing English, French and native songs and

music. Everyone would look at the beautiful goods brought in by the merchants and bring the summer furs to be prepared for the long trip back to Detroit. The name of this celebration comes from the Wea name for the November Moon, the hunting moon. This was the time of good hunting for the Wea as they broke from their summer camps at Fort Ouiatenon and dispersed along the Wabash to hunt for the winter.



## **Discussion Questions**

What do you think life was like for children living at Fort Ouiatenon during the 1700s?

How was life different for people living at Fort Ouiatenon in the 1700s from the life of people living in Indiana today?

After visiting The Feast of the Hunters' Moon, what job did you observe that is no longer done today? Why do you think that is?

Describe how the people at Fort Ouiatenon dressed. What did you notice about the men and women's clothing that is different from the clothing we wear today?

If you had lived at Fort Ouiatenon in the 1700s, what job would like to have done and why?

Why would it have been important for the people living at Fort Ouiatenon in the 1700s to get along with the Native Americans living nearby?

At the Feast of the Hunters' Moon:

Find a Voyageur and ask him about the designs and colors on his canoe.

Find a Native American and ask him or her if they are wearing jewelry that has a special meaning to them.

Visit the Blockhouse and ask a fur trader to show you the different types of animal fur on display.

Find the blacksmith and ask him how he learned to do his job.

Listen to musicians. What instruments are they playing?