

Research Reveals Similarities in American, Jamaican Tribal People

The Native Indians of Jamaica and Michigan

This month, I thought I would combine some research I did on the native Indians of Michigan along with that of the culture and lifestyles of the native Indians of Jamaica. The comparisons are interesting.

The native Indians of Jamaica (now extinct from the island) were known as the Tainos. They inhabited Jamaica somewhere between AD 600 and 900. The Indians native to Michigan are the Chippewa Indians.

Both of these Indian nations were relatively peaceful and nature-loving. Tainos died out



by Ralston Blair

Island to Island



from the island owing to enforced labor and sickness, which they experienced with the arrival and the subsequent dominance of the island by the Spaniards.

Chippewa Indians today still carry out many of the age-old customs of their past.

Up until recent times, the Tainos were known as Arawaks by most Jamaicans. This was a mistake which came about from the name of the native language they spoke, called *arawakan*. Like the Tainos, there has been some confusion over the names of the Chippewa Indians also. They have been called "Ojibway," "Ojibwe," and "Ojibwa." The reason behind this is that while they're known as Chippewas in the United States, they're known as "Ojibway," in Canada (where the tribes also extend). The Ojibway people, too, have a name which they call themselves. This is "Anishinabe," which means "original people."

Geographically, the Tainos not only resided in Jamaica, but also in the much larger Caribbean islands (such as Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, Cuba, and the Bahama Islands). Similarly, the Chippewas were also a large tribe (in fact, they're the largest American Indian group in North America). There are nearly 150 different bands throughout their original homeland in the Northern states (especially Minnesota, Wisconsin, and

Michigan) and in Southern Canada (especially in Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan).

Tainos and Chippewa dwellings were, for the most part, very similar. The Tainos lived in small round huts, approximately 14 feet in diameter, with nine posts planted in the ground in a circle and one in the center to support the roof. The top and sides would have been covered with leaves to protect the occupants from the elements. There was a type of Chippewa dwelling with close resemblance to that of the Tainos. It was round in shape and was made by those of the tribe who lived in the woodlands. They had villages of small round buildings called *waginan* or *wigwams*. For American Indians who lived on the Great Plains, however, their homes were tents made from buffalo hide called *tipis* or *teepees*.

The Tainos and Chippewas both used canoes as their main mode of transport. On land, they would usually just walk to their destinations. The Chippewas did use dogs to carry their belongings. They also used sleds and snowshoes to help in winter. There were no horses in North America until the colonists brought them over from Europe.

As for the similarity in clothing, Andres Benaldez (who traveled with Christopher Columbus to Jamaica) described the Tainos clothing vividly. He noted the head coverings of the men; some

made of feathers, some fashioned like a helmet. There was facial painting and ornaments of beads and beaten metal worn on their foreheads, ears, necks, nose, waists, arms, and feet. Traditionally, the Chippewas also wore leather headbands with feathers standing straight up in the back. In times of war, the men shaved their heads. In the 1800s some Chippewa chiefs and other important men began wearing long headdresses like their neighbors, the Sioux. Otherwise, Chippewa men and women generally wore their hair in two long braids. Both genders

painted their faces and arms with bright colors for special occasions. They used different paints for war paint and festive decorations. Chippewa women wore long dresses with removable sleeves and the men wore breechcloths with leather pant legs tied on. Both genders wore puckered moccasins on their feet. In colonial times, the Chippewas adapted European costumes, such as cloth blouses and jackets, decorating them with fancy beadwork.

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Columnists From 1956 Town Crier Return to Mackinac



Ann and John MacDonald pose with one of their old Town Criers in front of the Mackinac Bridge on a trip this fall to Mackinac. They wrote a column about college student workers in 1956.

Ann and John MacDonald remember Mackinac Island for a number of things: They met here as college students in 1955, fell in love here, and they wrote a column for and about college students in *The Mackinac Island Town Crier* in 1956. They were married in 1958 and return here to visit each fall.

Their column, *Off Campus*, appeared each week during the 1956 season and talked about things for students to do, social news about businesses and workers.

Ann Woodruff was a student at Michigan State University, where she subsequently earned a degree in education. Her first job on the Island was at the Gilded Cage, but she then became a waitress at the Carriage Lantern.

John MacDonald was a

law student at Wayne State University and a Grand Hotel dock porter at the Arnold Dock in 1955 and 1956. He spotted Miss Woodruff getting off the boat in 1955 and "pinned" her that summer. Their columnist predecessors, Sally Blackman and Chris Crawford, both students at the University of Michigan, noted they were still together in 1956, the week before Ann and John took over the column for the summer.

When they left, O.J. Golden took over the column.

After the MacDonalds were married, she taught school for awhile, then reared their three children. He is now Chief Judge with the 35th District Court in Plymouth.

The couple lives in Northville and have five grandchildren.

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