

~ Sacred Potawatomi Burial Ground ~



Docent Deborah Dumelle Kristmann

At one time there were more than 500 Potawatomi living on the shores of Geneva Lake. Their main or royal village was located in what is now Fontana and they kept a village for gardens and hunting on the shore of Geneva Lake in what is now Williams Bay.

On the south side of Elm Street is the location of the sacred burial ground of the Potawatomi in Williams Bay. Two of Chief Big Foot's wives and children were buried here. It is likely some of their deaths were caused by the whooping cough epidemic that devastated Big Foot's tribe shortly before their removal to Kansas in 1836.



Replication of what the above ground burial of Chief Big Foot's wife may have looked like.

The wives were buried on a raised platform, dressed in fine broadcloth, and adorned with jewelry, and beads, other trinkets. Each was buried with a pipe tobacco, and a pail of whiskey for their journey to the spirit world. The remains were covered with slabs of bark to protect the remains from the weather.

In 1890, Festus Williams described the burial of Big Foot's wives as he remembered it to James Simmons, author of the "Annals of Lake Geneva" (1897). His recollections of burial included a description of the clothing and trinkets.-- *by docent Deborah Dumelle Kristmann.*