



Early Native Americans

The city you know is only about 150 years old. Long ago, before it was a city, people lived in this area. They were Native Americans who lived in Chicago long before it had this name.

They were the ones who actually gave it its name. They called the city Checagou, which means wild onions. Every year, it was difficult to live here in the wintertime because it was snowy and extremely cold. There were not even any plants to pick. Then, the first plant that grew was the wild onion. In early spring, the Native Americans would eat it. Therefore, this became the place of the wild onion. No one actually planted it; the onion grew naturally.

Living with the Environment There were grasslands and forests, and there were also many animals. The Native Americans survived by hunting and fishing and from food they grew. In the summer, they grew food by planting vegetables. While it was still summer, they began to prepare for the winter.

They knew it would be freezing and snowy. They would be able to track rabbits in the winter, and there would also be deer. However, they would not have as much food because there would be no plants growing in winter.

Changing with the Seasons

In summer, the families would relocate to a village near a lake or river and build homes there. They would build the homes together. The homes were very large, so that a family could have several people living in one home. The families would fish and grow food. People in the village helped each other out. There always was work to do, and the family members shared the jobs.

Then in winter, they would leave the village and build homes in the woods. Each family would build its own home, and would take animal skins with them to help construct their homes. They would use branches to make a kind of tent, and then cover the walls with those skins to keep them warm.

They were particularly skilled at building those types of homes.

They would continue to hunt for food, and sometimes they would move their home in winter to a place where they could find more animals to hunt. It was difficult to get the food they needed. The weather was harsh, and animals sometimes died of starvation. Native Americans had to deal with the weather, getting food, and keeping warm. So, when they found the wild onions they knew it soon would be better weather and they would have more food. They would be able to join their friends and family at the summer village.

Many Changes

Today in Chicago, Native Americans face different challenges. They have jobs to earn money to live. They work every day in many occupations. No longer is it a place for hunting and building your own home. So much has changed that it is hard to imagine what it looked like here long ago.