

## The Miami Nation

Historic Forks of the Wabash preserves the story of the interaction between the Miami Indian nation, the European settlers, and the American government.

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- Chief's House
- Treaty Grounds

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**Miami Culture**

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Native Americans camped near the Forks of the Wabash for millennia. The Miami Indians reentered this area in the late 1600s, and by 1700 had laid claim to the entire Wabash Valley.

When the first French explorers entered Indiana in the 1760s, all of Indiana and the western half of Ohio were regarded as the home territory of the Miami and their Algonquian cousins - the Delaware, Kickapoo, Shawnee Potawatami and others.

The earliest Europeans to come here were traders, and since the Miami were also traders, the two cultures coexisted more or less comfortably for about a century.

But as more and more settlers came West, conflicts developed.

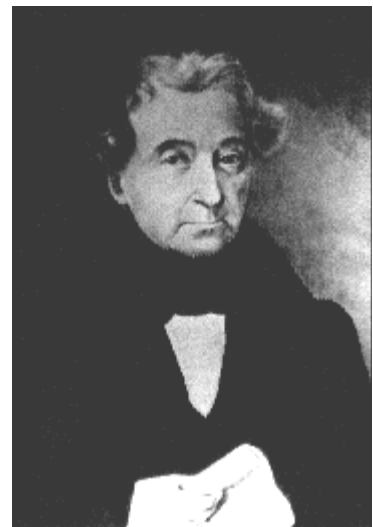
The Indians, under the leadership of the Miami War Chief Little Turtle, won several notable battles, but they were decisively defeated by Anthony Wayne in 1794.

During the next fifty years the Miami and their fellow Algonquians gradually negotiated away all their land. Negotiators representing the US Government and the Miami Nation met at the Forks between 1833 and 1840 to work out [three treaties](#).

Two civil chiefs were instrumental to the unfolding of events during this period: Jean Baptiste Richardville (*Peshewa*) and his son-in-law, Francis Lafontaine (*Topeah*).

Their [council house](#) is preserved at the Historic Forks of the Wabash.

Richardville was Civil Chief of the Miami from 1816 to 1841. He was a skilled negotiator who won important concessions from the U.S. Government in treaty negotiations. He was also an able businessman with many business interests. He was said to have been the wealthiest Indian in North America at the time of his death, with an estate valued, in 1841 dollars, at about \$1,000,000. His wealth derived partly from his control of the Long Portage



and the tolls he charged those who used the portage. He is said to be buried on the grounds of Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Fort Wayne.

Richardville was succeeded as Civil Chief by his son-in-law, Francis Lafontaine, also known by his Miami name *Topeah* ("frost on the bushes"). Credible historical sources indicate that it was actually Lafontaine who constructed, in the early 1840s, the building we know as "[the Chief's House](#)." Lafontaine used this building as his main residence.

To Lafontaine fell the responsibility for presiding over the Miami Nation in Indiana during the forced removal to Kansas Territory. Continuing the efforts established by Chief Richardville, Lafontaine successfully kept nearly one half of the Miami Nation in Indiana. When the remainder of the tribe was forced to move west in 1846, he went with them. Lafontaine died while returning to Indiana in 1847. He is buried in Huntington.