First Farmers

Woodland Period - 1000 B.C. to A.D. 1600

Settling Down
The way of life of people in Pennsylvania did not change much for 1500 to 2000 years after 1000 B.C., the beginning of the Woodland Period as defined by archaeologists. Native Americans continued to move seasonally in search of food. However, groups of families may have stayed together longer at places where there was abundant wild food and where gourds, sunflowers, and other plants with nutritious seeds could be cultivated. They continued making pottery, learning how to make it thinner and more durable.

Changing Technology
Woodland Indians began using the bow and arrow about A.D. 600. Small triangular stone points became the standard tips for arrows. As in earlier times, other tools were made from stone, bone, antler, and wood. Woodland people also continued using plant fibers to make cordage, which was used for making things such as nets, bags, sandals, and coarse woven material.

Growing Corn
Gradually, Woodland Indians began to grow non-native domesticated plants that were introduced through trade—first squash, then corn, and later beans. Corn was widely grown in this region by A.D. 1000 and became a staple in the diet. When beans were added to the diet about A.D. 1300, gardens and fields would have included corn, beans, squash, as well as domesticated sunflower and goosefoot. Wild fruits, seeds, berries, and plant tubers were also gathered and eaten. Tobacco was grown and smoked in stone or ceramic pipes.

Village Life
By A.D. 800, people lived along rivers and streams where they could fish and plant their gardens in fertile soil. At first, they settled in small family farmsteads or in hamlets of several families. After A.D. 1250, they established larger villages consisting of small houses or several large longhouses, sometimes surrounded by a stockade. Some families moved out of the village during the growing season to cultivate land along smaller streams. Occasionally, small groups of people would set out on short trips to hunt, gather, collect special stone to make tools, or trade with their neighbors. Archaeologists believe that there were no villages in Centre County. Only small campsites, farmsteads, and hamlets have been discovered.