

22# Native Americans

Signs of Native American settlement are written across the land near the Class of 1918 Marsh. Walk the trails from here to Picnic Point or to Willow Creek Woods, and you'll find visible clusters of round or elongate grassy mounds rimming the path. These are effigy or burial mounds, built by Native people who lived here about 1,000 years ago.

Many mounds are located near water or areas rich in natural resources that could support temporary social gatherings. This area was certainly no exception; Native Americans spent the warmer months where the Yahara River watershed provided them with waters rich in fish, wild rice, waterfowl, and mollusks. Cattails were also important resources that were woven into mats. The fluffy mature cattail spikes were used to insulate moccasins and cradle boards. Cattail cores, roots, and early green blooms could be eaten. Native Americans hunted migratory waterfowl and trapped muskrat. They also netted and speared northern pike and other fishes.

European settlers of Madison in the 1800s and early 1900s made use of the same fish and wildlife resources. They also harvested sedge meadows for "marsh hay" to use as bedding for livestock. Construction workers of the Wisconsin Capitol building even used it to stuff their own beds. These settlers, however, did not use their resources as sustainably as the Native Americans had. Today, these resources are not essential to a Madison resident's current way of life.