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Special Purpose Structures

Places of Rituals and Daily Practice



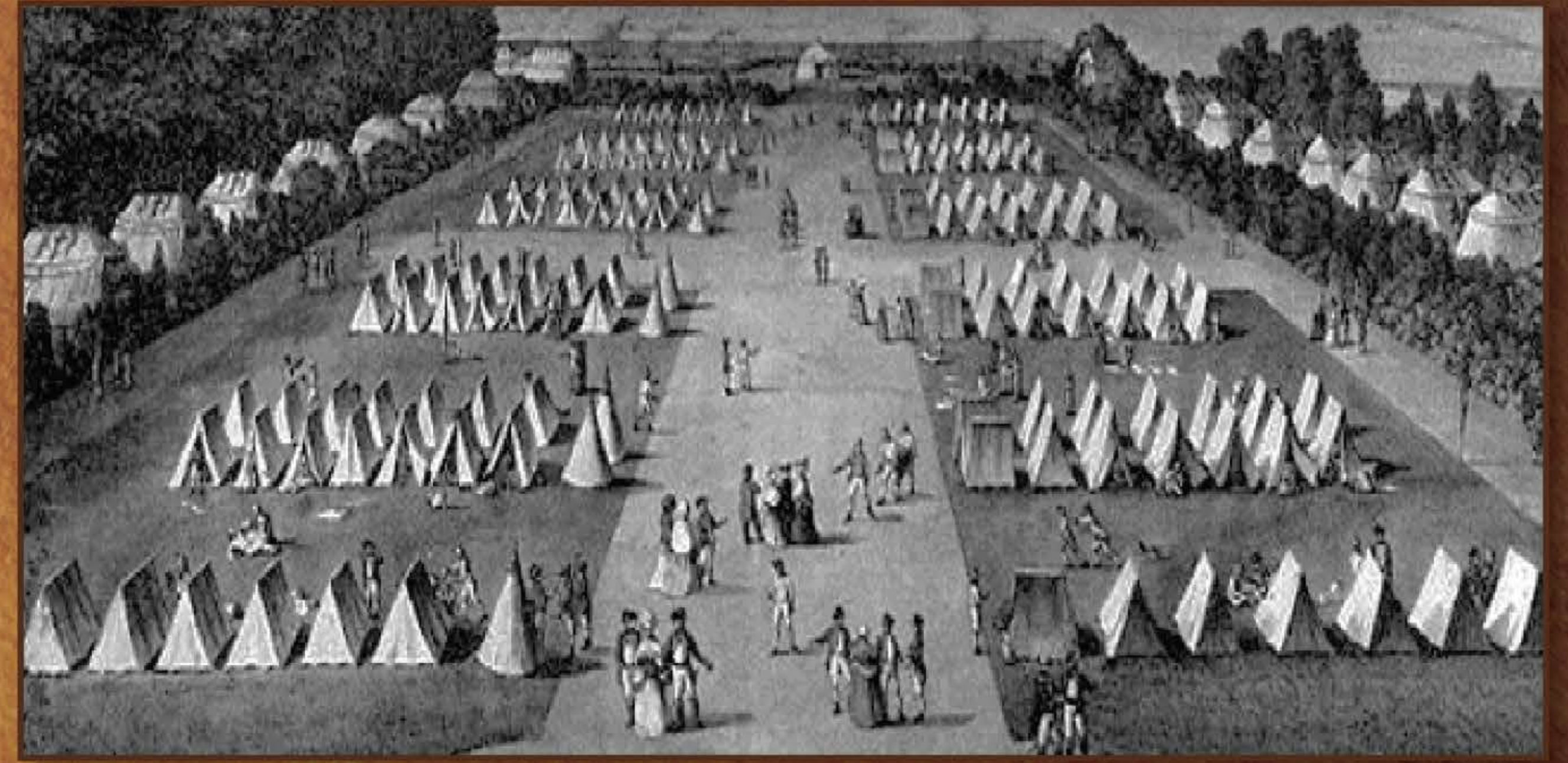
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Southwest Michigan took an active part in the 18th century fur trade. Voyageurs journeyed from Montreal in birchbark canoes heavily laden with goods including metal tools and cloth to exchange with native peoples for furs. During their travel to Fort St. Joseph, voyageurs often stayed in wedge-style tents.

◀ The French used wedge-style tents like this one in the eighteenth century.

A British military encampment during the Revolutionary War. ▶



Tents kept voyageurs dry in cold and wet weather. A standard wedge tent was durable, lightweight, and folded into a compact bundle.

Voyageurs often slept beneath their canoes and used tents as additional shelter. When erected, wedge-style tents stood 7' tall. Two vertical poles and a ridge pole formed a frame to support the canvas, and thirteen pegs driven into the ground held it taut.



▲ Bark covered *skek-mez-eh-gay-geh-muk* or sugaring house was a large structure used during the early spring for evaporating maple sap to make maple sugar, Rockland, Michigan. Courtesy of Michigan Tech Archives.

Another common special purpose structure used by native people in the western Great Lakes region was the sweat lodge. Oral histories and archaeology indicate that Neshnabe people used the sweat lodge for millennia.



Similar to wigwams, sweat lodges were made by placing bent saplings into the ground to form a dome shape. In this regard, the sweat lodge is referred to as mother earth's womb since it resembles a pregnant woman's stomach region.

◀ Native American sweat lodge pit.

This process symbolically represents Mother Earth. In the middle of the lodge a small hole is dug where hot rocks are placed. Water is then poured on the rocks to create steam. This process served to purify the individual mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

The Potawatomis also used temporary structures, when they moved between seasonal camps. These structures, called *n-sweh-o-gan*, were easily assembled, teepee-shaped homes covered in lightweight mats or rolls of birch bark.

Voyageurs



▼ Wedge-style tents in a British military encampment during the Revolutionary War.



▲ Archaeologists believe this concentration of fire-cracked rock is the remains of a Native American sweat lodge at the Schilling site in Kalamazoo County. The burned wood used to heat the stones dated to 2,300 years old. Photo by William Cremin.

