Extra! Extra! Andre trades a hundred furs! 
Canadians in awe!

Tiffany, Angela, Tom, Krista, Andre

Here we are with Andre the Canadian trader. He traveled 60 days through America’s uncharted wilderness alone in his birch bark canoe to trade with the Potowatomi Indians. Andre brought with him colored beads and cloth, but more importantly, metal. The Potowatomi were friendly people who accepted and willingly traded their furs for these items. The most valued fur was the winter beaver pelt. In Canada, Andre brings back his one hundred furs amazing his Canadian buyers.
Potowatomi Indians fully utilized every animal they killed. Because the animals gave up their life so that the Indians could continue theirs, nothing from the animal was wasted as a sign of respect. Some of the animals they used were deer, porcupines, beavers, turtles, foxes, and skunks.

From the deer, the Potowatomi Indians made clothing and blankets out of the hides. They then used their bones to make tools and games. Deer tendons were used as a strong string to bind tools and for their bows and arrows. The deer’s stomach was used to carry water and the eyes to make glue.

The Potowatomi made use of the beaver, skunk, and fox furs to trade with the French. Amongst the three animals, the beaver fur was the most valuable due to its water resistant qualities. In return for the furs, the Potowatomi would receive metal in forms of pots, spoons, and tools from the French.

Porcupines and turtles were valued by the Potowatomi as artistic expressions of their culture in the form of purses and jewelry. They acquired the porcupine quills by a sneak blanket attack that caused the quills to attach themselves to the blanket without harming the porcupine. They would then dye the quills using flowers, vegetables, and blood and preserve them with urine. The turtle shell was used to make an adorable and sturdy purse.

To recapitulate, the Potowatomi Indians, out of respect for all living things, made complete use of every animal they found the need to kill. The animal parts were used to meet all the basic needs of the Indians: food, clothing, tools, games, and fashion.
Toys of the Potowatomi

The toys that the Potowatomi children used were multi-functional. The toys brought entertainment to the children and they also helped the children to develop better hand-eye coordination. The children played games until around the age of eleven and after that they focused more on becoming an adult and contributing to their tribe. There were not many different types of games, however the same game could be played at different levels. As a child mastered one level, they were then able to move up to a more challenging one. The children enjoyed playing with the games and as they played they were developing other skills. They were developing skills that would help out their tribes. By playing these games and developing skills such as hand-eye coordination, they would become better hunters. One example of a game is ring and pin. The purpose of the game was to swing a specific object onto a pin. Some of the objects were rings, vertebrates, or leather depending on the difficulty of the level. Some games even included a combination of the objects. The pictures below show examples of the games that were played.

By: Katie E., Kristen. Tina & Katie B.
Throughout history, Native American women have been portrayed as little more than slaves or second-class citizens. After our visit to the Isle A La Cache Museum, we learned that the opposite was true. Native American women were actually the power behind the men: they choose the leaders of the tribe, “owned” the property, and made most of the major decisions. Women were in charge of all the domestic chores in the tribe. They made clothes, built their houses called wigwams, prepared food, and passed on the tribes’ traditions. Such as story telling to young children, beadwork, creating of the weapons, woodwork, making birch bark bowls called Makus. The men also saw them as stronger, due to the fact that they bore children and therefore possessed two spirits.

Native American folklore teaches that women were instrumental in the creation of the world. They believe that “Sky Woman” fell from the sky and “Great Turtle” created the world on his back, where it still lies today. This is also why Native Americans feel that all life should be honored and respected. This experience gave us a chance to see that, as women, we have always played an important role in the continuity of traditions.
This is Whispering Wind at Isle A La Cache. She represents the women of the Potowatomi tribe, who were considered the leaders of the tribe due to the ability of women to bear children. Therefore, women had the power in the Potowatomi tribe. Many of the women had French husbands due to the men who came down from Ontario, Canada, to trade metal and colored items such as fabric and beads in exchange for fur, especially beaver.

Whispering Wind demonstrated to us the various roles and responsibilities of the women in the tribe. We were somewhat surprised that the women in the tribe did all of the heavy work, from constructing the wigwam, skinning and butchering the animals, and using the various parts of the animals to construct the tools they used. The Potowatomi people were not a wasteful society in that they used all elements of the killed animals. The eyeballs were used for glue, the tendons (“sinew”) were used as a strong string-like material to adhere the bones to the wooden handles of the tools. The women also made the wigwams from dried cattail reeds and they were tied with the leaves of the cattails. Once again, not to be wasteful, the fuzzy brown part of the cattail was used to start fires, stuff pillows, cooking flour, and to stuff baby diapers.
BEAVERS FOR TRADING
By: Angela, Kristen, & Sarah

French traders came from Montreal on a six-month canoe trip to trade goods for beaver pelts. Other furs were traded but beaver pelts were worth the most. The French people wanted the beaver pelts for several reasons. Reasons include durability and most importantly, the beaver fur is waterproof. Once the trader brings the beaver pelts back to Montreal, he sells them to many factories where novelty coats, hats, and other outerwear were produced. A trader would only have to make one or two of these trips to become a wealthy man. The Potowatomi were happy to receive different metals, fabrics, and many other goods in exchange for the beaver coats. There were two types of pelts that were traded, summer and winter beaver. The summer beaver pelt has thinner fur, is less dense, and is usually smaller in size; therefore the winter beaver pelt was worth more due to its thickness and size. Two summer pelts were worth one winter pelt. Fur trade was an important aspect for both the Potowatomi economy and the French economy.
Our “Bosley”
The Life of a Courier Du Bois named Andre
Written by: Andre’s Angels AKA: Bridget McMahon, Shannon Kapinus, and Roberta Payne

One lovely afternoon we had the pleasure of meeting a wonderful man named Andre. Andre told us about his life and all the hardships he must endure. Andre is what they call a Courier Du Bois. What is a Courier Du Bois you might ask? A Courier Du Bois is a French Canadian who travels by canoe months at a time to trade with the Potowatomi Indians that have settled in America.

So what does Andre trade? Andre and his fellow Courier Du Bois are known for trading metal items such as pots, pans, knifes, and ax heads. Andre would also trade glass beads and jewelry, as well as colorful enticing linens. In return for these goods Andre would trade and get many types of fur. Fox fur, beaver fur, and even deer fur. You see the fur was a big hit with the French. Not only for the waterproof fur of the beaver, but the fur made very stylish hats. Anybody who was anybody in Canada had a fur hat made of beaver.

Even though thus far Andre’s life seems quite glamorous, the harsh truth of it all is that it was no “walk in the park.” Andre traveled about 6 months alone, in uncharted waters and lands. The most common route traveled by Courier Du Bois was through the Great Lakes and through the I & M Canal. All Andre could bring with him was the bare essentials, items for trading, his birch bark canoe, and nothing else but the clothes on his back. Andre had to remember when trading not to trade anything necessary for survival, or Andre will not survive his long journey home.

The day we met our “Bosley”, he was quite successful. Andre returned home with 30 some beaver furs. Some Courier Du Bois, however, are not always that successful. The life of Andre is hard, and enduring. But Andre taught us that anything can be accomplished when you have the ambition to succeed, a well thought out plan, and an undying spirit. And of course a little beaver fur doesn’t hurt.