

# Starved Rock Legend

From "History of LaSalle County" by Elmer Baldwin (1977), and from material compiled by Steve Stout, author of "The Starved Rock Murders".

The Illinois Valley was formerly the site of the greatest Native American population in the United States. Tribes hunted buffalo herds and caught fish in the river. Around campfires, young braves learned legends from the old and performed ancient dances of war.

The best known and possibly the largest group of Native Americans to live in this area were the Illinois from the 1500's to the 1700's. This tribe, between five and ten thousand, was divided into sub-tribes. One, the Kaskaskia, had their village extending along the north bank of the Illinois River near the lock and dam across from Starved Rock .

In August, 1673, five French "Voyageurs" led by explorer Louis Jolliet and accompanied by Father Jacques Marquette, became the first known Europeans to enter the area. They canoed up the Illinois River from the Mississippi, stopping at the Kaskaskia village. Two years later, Father Marquette returned to the village and founded the Mission of the Immaculate Conception. It was the first Illinois Christian mission near what is now Utica.

Several years later, Rene Robert Cavalier de LaSalle and his lieutenant Henri de Tonti claimed the Mississippi Valley for France. Their objective was to build a chain of forts to confine the English colonies to the east coast. They built Fort St. Louis on top of Starved Rock in the winter of 1682, towering above the last rapids in the Illinois River.



Native Americans settled in great numbers near the fort to gain protection from the feared Iroquois tribe and to be near a source of French trade goods. Later Fort St. Louis was used as a refuge by traders and trappers until destroyed by fire around 1720.

In the decades that followed, the French halted plans of colonization and left the area in 1765 leaving behind the loyal Chief Pontiac to fight against English invaders.

Pontiac was assassinated through an English-inspired plot involving an Illinois brave who stabbed Chief Pontiac to death. The Pottawatomi, Kickapoo, and Miami tribes quickly sought to avenge his murder. The enraged tribes chased the Illinois to the top of Starved Rock.

Legend says that the struggle went on until "the cliffs of the rock were stained red and slippery with the remains".

The last of the Illinois warriors, weakened by famine, were killed by the tomahawks of the climbing enemy.

A few days later, traveling traders enroute to Canada stopped to see why flocks of buzzards were circling the rock. On approaching the top, the traders were sickened by the numbers of decaying bodies. The stench was so offensive that the traders left and took with them the legend of the dead.

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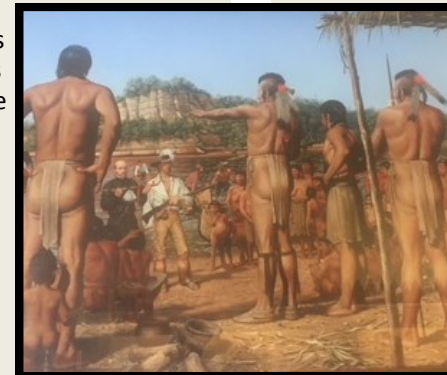
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## The Legend of Starved Rock

Starved Rock State Park obtained its name from a legendary incident that supposedly occurred in the 1760's. Most of the Illinois lived along the Mississippi but a small village of 500 Peoria Native Americans still lived in this area. The dominant tribe of the day were the Ottawa who controlled the Potawatomi and Fox that lived up river from here.

It was the Ottawa Chieftain, Pontiac, who went to the southern part of the state to negotiate some trade agreements with the French and was murdered by an Illinois of this area. Word got back that the great chief was dead.

wanted to avenge their leader's death. The Potawatomi and Fox paddled down river and attacked the Illinois Village by the great rock. A fierce battle was waged for several days; the Illinois' number was reduced in half. The Potawatomi and Fox went back to their village and the Illinois knew that if they were to survive, they would have to abandon their village. They decided to seek refuge on top of the great rock.



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The Illinois hoped the Potawatomi and Fox would by-pass them on their way to tribes further south; however, the Potawatomi and Fox surrounded the base of the rock. They shattered any buckets the Illinois tried to lower to the river for water. The Potawatomi and Fox periodically went to the top of Devil's Nose and showered the Illinois with arrows. As the Illinois grew more desperate, they tried to sneak off the rock at night, but all were killed. Eventually all of the Illinois on top of the rock starved, and ever since, this site has been called "Starved Rock".

There were no written records to report this event actually happened. The story came down through the years from Native American story-tellers. However, due to the strategic location of the rock, we do have evidence it was used countless times as a battleground. Archaeological excavations have revealed numerous artifacts including skeletons and weapons used over thousands of years.

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