

"The People of Iowa" Essay from *The Goldfinch*, September 1985

The People of Iowa

These Mesquakie Indian boys await their turn to dance at the annual pow wow. Each year the Mesquakie invite all Iowans to attend the celebration at the settlement near Tama.

The Mesquakie have lived in Iowa for about 350 years. Here they hunted, fished, and planted gardens. In the late summer they celebrated the corn harvest.

When white settlers came, many Mesquakie were forced to move to Kansas reservations. Some stayed behind, hiding in the forests along the Iowa River. The Kansas Mesquakie longed to return home. Finally the tribe bought 3,000 acres along the river near Tama. They have lived there ever since.

Some Mesquakie adopted white ways of living. But they did not forget the old ways. Many still build the traditional wickiups by bending branches into a dome and covering it with mats or bark. Most practice their old religion. They teach their children the ancient stories in the Mesquakie language.

The Mesquakie are a private people. They cherish their traditions and their land. Every August at the pow wow, they share their special heritage with other Iowans.