

After doing research of who donated this squash to Winona and the many hands it went through, I found no evidence of the clay ball story: the archeologist, the dig, and the carbon dating which I wanted desperately to find for important indigenous seed storage data and replication models. I tracked our line of the Cool Old Squash seed back threw a few hands to historian David Wrone. I think it is important to tell the truth of this story now that it is known. Here is what David has to share about the origins of the squash seed. He told me I could share this memo he sent to me:

Memo on squash seed.

David R. Wrone

In 1995 if my memory serve me well I accompanied the Menominee traditional artist James F. Frechette, Jr., to Indiana where a museum had purchased one of his fabulous wood carvings of a Menominee Clan (you can see photos of his work on the UWSP web site The Menominee Clans story that depicts 20+ in its collection) .

While in that area we were introduced to some elderly Miami, some of them—women—who had just arrived from attending their gardens. We chatted. Jim then asked a couple who were elders of the particular community if they would show us their nearby garden. They agreed. They pointed out the various features of garden plants, most sort of ordinary things. Then they pointed out the squash growing on the edge of the plantings and described them. There were two kinds, one that I shall call for ease of writing regular, the one under discussion today (and the seeds I gave away) and the other ancient, which I shall write about below.

They told Jim and me that the regular squash had been in the tribal economy for many generations, time out of mind, perhaps a one or two thousand years. Indians did not have white man's calendars. But each year the women (and men also) planted them to keep them from cross pollinating with any other type of squash—although they never mentioned any other, just that they took care. Then they dried and kept seeds for the next season, although the seeds would keep I found out for many years.

They also explained how in the old days and presumably yet that year, 1995, how they used the squash. Sliced and dried was one way; the pieces could be threaded on a string and hung in the roof of the wigwam, etc. It would be easy to pull some off and tossed in a cooking pot along with say meat or maple sugar, etc.

Jim asked if they would have any seeds for him and me. They said yes, but since it was the growing season they must wait until the end of season. We then forgot about them. Then one day in the autumn a small package arrived. It *had* the seeds from the regular and the ancient squash. The package with the date stamp is in a private possession, along with some rough notes from Indiana, and declarations from me and Mike Hoffman, a Menominee. Jim passed away 5 years ago and he is primarily the reason the seeds were shipped to us. There is in Indian traditional culture a concept of reciprocity.

This was not expressed by neither Jim nor the elders, it was part of their definition of a traditional person and did not need be: Jim brought the carving of a traditional figure and they recognized this.

It is also to be noted that the names of these Miami were not given. In traditional Indian culture it was never done to promote oneself or to assume importance from exploiting the Great Mysteries kind gift.

The ancient seeds were seeds found some years previous to our coming to Indiana. They found in a cave in Kentucky far, far deep in an underground cave (some of those KY caves go for miles, resting on a ledge where early Indians had placed them. With perfect temp and humidity. Some remnants of material near them were testing for age and they were found to be several thousand o years old. I was told by a white man who accompanied us one day—and I believe I am memory correct—they were 4 t-5,000 years old. This sounds rather too old to germinate etc. But he was scientific in his description.

I grew them the first year and they were smallish and much inferior in taste to the regular. The Indians had obviously carefully developed the regular squash—much I suppose like they did corn.

I never gave any ancient seeds to anyone.

I initially gave seeds of the regular to Stockbridge folk. Because near the area in Indiana where I got them was one of the places the tribe in its movement west was one where they had stayed.

David Wrone

There is no clay ball.

My thought is that the story entered a nice game of telephone after David, but I think it proves a point that growing out seeds for 1,000 or 2,000 years, year after year by seed keepers of the Miami tribe is a more powerful action and message than a seed sitting neglected for 800 years or so. That is why it tasted so good and the other one was bitter!

Through some connections, I have been able to locate the Miami Gardeners who grew this squash and will follow up with them in a respectful way to hear their story on the seeds and perhaps record a second edition to the 'Cool Old Squash' Radio Broadcast if they they are ok with that. So check back for part 2!