

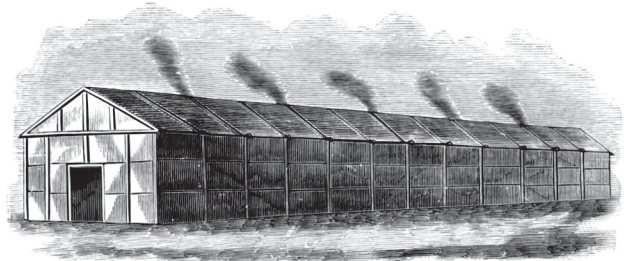
NATION PROFILE: THE IROQUOIS (1)

The Iroquois called themselves *Haudenosaunee* (pronounced ho • dee • no • SHOW • nee), or “people of the longhouse.” At one time during prehistoric times, the Iroquois lived among the Algonquin-speaking neighbors. Then more than 1,000 ago, the Iroquois moved into the thick green forests of central New York. They lived in a region of many rivers and lakes. Their descendants moved south and eastward forming several new Native American groups. Sometime in the 1400s they formed the powerful **League of Five Nations** to protect themselves from the Algonquin, who often made war upon them. The Iroquois League or Five Nations consisted of five tribes—**Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca.**

The Iroquois were organized in councils. At the top was the League of Council. Each tribe had a set number of members on that council. These council members were called **sachems**. The head mothers of a family chose the sachems. In addition to the sachems were special council members called **Pine Trees**. Often they were famous warriors. They could speak at council meeting, but only sachems were allowed to vote. The main purpose of the council was to keep peace among the league’s tribes. A tribal council ran each village. Within each village, clans formed. Different forest animals were used to name the clans.

The Iroquois learned to use the surrounding forests for their needs. Their homes, **longhouses**, were made from elm,

hickory, maple, and birch trees. They were about 80 to 150 feet long and 20 to 30 feet wide. They hung a carving of their clan above the doorway. Each longhouse



was home to 15–20 families. People slept on cornhusk mats and in winter used bearskins to keep warm. Food and fire pits were shared among families in the longhouse.

The men in the clan worked together to hunt, trade, and fight. They used bows and arrows to hunt deer, black bear, elk, moose, and beaver. They also fished with spears



and basket traps. Young Iroquois boys were trained for war. The activities focused on strength, courage, and skill with the bow and arrow, tomahawks, and clubs.

NATION PROFILE: THE IROQUOIS (2)

Iroquois women mainly headed the families. Children always became members of their mother's clan, not their father's. As a group, the women planted "**the three sisters**"— corn, beans, and squash. They



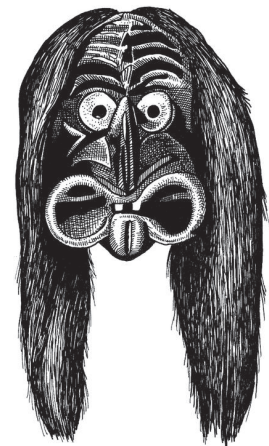
stored their food supplies for the winter. As well as doing the cooking, the women crafted fine pottery and

baskets. They made twine and thread from the inner bark of elm trees. They made buckskin clothing for the clan.

The Iroquois believed that **Sky Woman (Orenda)** created the world. Sky Woman brought seeds with her, which created the plants. Her "grandsons" created the Iroquois. The **Good Brother** created all the good things. **Evil Brother** created all the bad things. The Iroquois also believe in many other supernatural beings or spirits that were responsible for natural happenings: thunder, plants, animals, etc. Festivals were held at different times of the year to give thanks and honor the different spirits.

The best-known part of the Iroquois religion is the **False Faces** (or Society of False Faces). The members of this group were medicine healers. They wore carved wooden masks to frighten the spirits of disease. The members wore the masks to a

patient's longhouse and screamed to scare away the evil spirits. They danced, made tobacco offerings, and shook their rattles over the sick person.



The Iroquois saw the Europeans as trading partners. They were not threatened by them because of their strong League of Nations. In later years, they played an important part in wars between France and England to control the New World.

