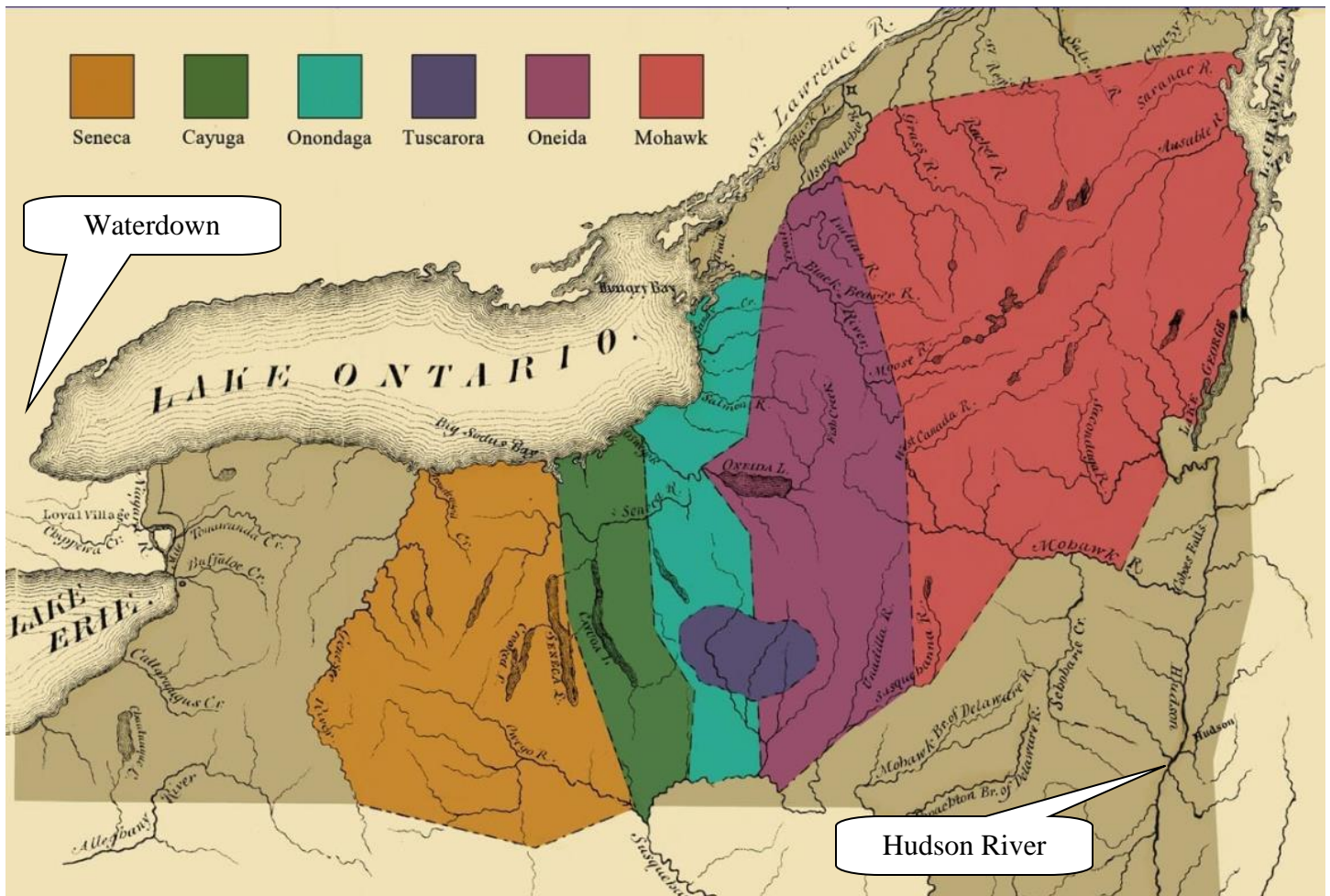


The Haudenosaunee Confederacy

(People of the Longhouse)¹



- The Haudenosaunee Confederacy considers itself to be the world's oldest representative democracy. It is comprised of various Indigenous Nations (famously – from east to west - the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca). Nations continue to join the Confederacy (the Tuscarora Nation did so in 1713, hence the origin of the name “Six Nations”).
 - Each nation maintains its own dialect, villages, and councils. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy dealt only with external issues – internal matters were controlled by the internal nations.

¹ This confederacy is also referred to as the Iroquois Confederacy (a name given to them by the French), Five Nations and Six Nations.

- The Haudenosaunee Confederacy was formed because of the constant fighting among the separate nations. Although there is no agreement as to when the League was formed, traditional oral history links it with a solar eclipse that occurred in 1451 (European calendar).
- Families are grouped in clans and a dozen or more clans might make up a village. Clan mothers named the men who represented the clans at village or councils.
 - The women attended clan meetings, stood behind the circle of men who spoke and voted, and removed the men from the office if they strayed too far from the wishes of the women.
- **While there are elected councils for the Six Nations of the Grand River (and other reserves), the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (encompassing all members - regardless of where their reserves may be) remains.**

All text in italics has been taken from the website of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com):

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy has been in place since time immemorial. The Peacemaker was sent by the Creator to spread the Kariwiiio or good mind. With the help of Aiionwatha commonly known as Hiawatha, the Peacemaker taught the laws of peace to the Haudenosaunee. Travelling from community to community they both succeeded in persuading the Chiefs of each nation to join in the Great League of Peace and founded the only government with a direct connection to the Creator.

Asking the Clan Mothers of each tribe to present their Chiefs, he placed deer antlers on each of their heads to symbolize their authority to the five nations. The Mohawks had nine Chiefs of the bear, wolf and turtle clans, the Oneida also had nine of the bear, wolf and turtle clans, Onondaga presented 14 of the turtle, snipe, bear, hawk, deer, wolf, eel, and beaver clans, Cayuga had 10 from the heron, deer, turtle, bear and snipe clans and finally Seneca presented eight Chiefs from the bear, snipe, turtle, wolf and eagle clans. The Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca and Onondaga accepted the long house as a symbol of their unity. In the Onondaga community the Peacemaker planted a tree naming it the Great Tree of Peace. He directed the Chiefs of the council to sit beneath the shade of the tree and watch the council fire of the confederacy of the five nations. He told them that all issues concerning the confederacy would be discussed and deliberated under this tree.



The roots outstretching from the tree reached north, south, east and west and were labeled the Great White Roots. The Peacemaker declared that any nation choosing to follow the guidelines of the Great Peace should follow the Great White Roots and make themselves known to the Chiefs of the confederacy. If they promised to obey the laws of peace they would be welcomed beneath the shade of the tree.

Above the tree an eagle was placed to see far and alert the confederacy of approaching enemies. Beneath the tree the Peacemaker asked that all men throw in their weapons to bury any greed, hatred and jealousy.

Finally, the Peacemaker took an arrow from each of the five nations and bound them together. In this way the nations were united in their powers and the union was complete. Each nation retained their own council with Chiefs chosen by Clan Mothers of families holding hereditary rights to office titles. The rights and duties of Chiefs are explained to them as they stand up as Chiefs and it is the Clan Mother who maintains his moral obligations and keeps him in a straight line.

One by one the Peacemaker took wampum strings, one for each of the laws of the Great Peace and described what each signified. With this action the Great Confederation of the Five Nations was formed. With his mission fulfilled the Peacemaker vanished promising that if the Great Peace should fail the people were to call his name in the bushes and he would return.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy thrives today and continues to enjoy the support of the Six Nations as their representative government even though an elective system was established in 1924.

Grand Council:

As a gathering of all the Chiefs from all nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy the Grand Council is the world's oldest representative democracy.

With 50 Chiefs in total representing all the clans from all the nations they work to resolve disputes and plan for the welfare of all the people. As stated by the Peacemaker, Onondaga stands as the fire keepers for the Grand Council. Grand Council Chiefs are divided into Elder Brothers and Younger Brothers with the Mohawks, Onondagas and Senecas making up the Elder Brothers with the Cayugas and Oneidas as the Younger Brothers.

The Tuscaroras who joined the league after the original joining have no voice within Grand Council and can only speak if it will help the nations. When they do have an issue to be discussed it is voiced through the Cayugas.

Clan Mothers:

The Iakoiane or Clan Mother, a title which is passed down hereditarily through a clan. Among the five nations of the confederacy there are nine Mohawk Clan Mothers, nine Oneida, thirteen Onondaga, ten Cayuga and eight Seneca for a total of forty-nine Clan Mothers. It is her responsibility to look out for the welfare of the clan by overseeing the actions of the Chief and ensuring that he is performing his duties in accordance with the Great Law. As Clan Mother she will have her own wampum of two strings, one white and one purple, signifying her title within the Haudenosaunee. Should she pass on, the string will then be passed on to the next hereditary Clan Mother.

If a Chief acts improperly or is not living up to his responsibilities his Clan Mother and Faith Keepers will warn him about his actions. If he continues to act selfishly the Clan Mother may symbolically remove his antlers, thus removing his authority as Chief.

When a Chief passes away a Clan Mother selects a candidate to replace him hopefully within three days of the funeral though this process can take much longer. She will choose the candidate and present him to her nation. This candidate is then presented to their brother nation for approval. If approved the candidate is presented to all other members of Grand Council for approval before a Condolence ceremony may begin to raise up the new Chief. The Chief Todaharo does not have a Clan Mother which is why there are only 49 Clan Mothers yet 50 Chiefs. In the case of replacing him the Onondaga Chiefs will all decide on a candidate while taking into consideration the advice of all the Clan Mothers.

The Clan Mothers title is usually passed on to her female relatives, first to her eldest sister or other sisters and if an appropriate person isn't found she will then look to her eldest daughter and other daughters. If an appropriate person is still not found a candidate will be sought out in the rest of the clan.

Like the Chiefs they choose, Clan Mothers must also live up to their duties and be good mothers to their children, knowledgeable of the Great Law and political structure of the Grand Council, honest and truthful and be a role model to the members of her clan.

As well as selecting and deposing Chiefs, Clan Mothers are also responsible for naming children from their own list of clan names and approving marriages to ensure that a bride and groom do not belong to the same clan and thus to the same family.

Clans:

Among the Haudenosaunee are groups of people who come together as families called clans. As a matrilineal society, each clan is linked by a common female ancestor with women possessing a leadership role within the clan. The number of clans varies among the nations with the Mohawk only having three to the Oneida having eight. The clans are represented by birds and animals and are divided into the three elements: water, land and air. The bear, wolf and deer represent the land element, the turtle, eel and beaver represent the water element and the snipe, hawk and heron represent the air element.

Each member of a clan is considered a relative regardless of which nation they belong to. A wolf clan member of the Mohawk and a wolf clan member of the Seneca nation are still considered relatives. Family names and clans are passed down from mother to child. For example if a man belonging to the turtle clan were to marry a woman of the wolf clan the children would be of the wolf clan. Within certain clans there may also be different types of one animal or bird. For example, the turtle clan has three different types of turtles, the wolf clan has three different types of wolves and the bear clan includes three different types of bears allowing for marriage within the clan as long as each belongs to a different species of the clan.

In Haudenosaunee society each person has their own family, which includes their mother, father and brothers and sisters. But with this comes their extended family including everyone else belonging to the same clan. This system was especially helpful when traveling from nation to nation as people would search out members of their same clan who would then would provide food and shelter and care for them as part of their family. Because people of the same clan are considered family, marriages within the same clan are forbidden. The clan system still survives among those who follow the traditions.