

# The Iroquoian people, including the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

- *Iroquoian* refers to the people who spoke a similar or related language, while the Haudenosaunee (means "people of the long house) Confederacy was a group of individual nations united in a type of federation (a.k.a. members of the League of Five Nations, or Iroquois Confederacy).
- Pre-Contact, the Iroquoian language was spoken by around 60,000 people in various independent nations throughout contemporary Southern Ontario and Northern New York State.



Did You Know?:  
Conotocaurious (Town Destroyer) was a title given to George Washington during the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Iroquois Peoples.

This is how the American President is still referred to today.



- This language group comprises the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, as well as such nations as the Wendat/Huron, **Chonnonton/Neutral (people who lived where Waterdown/Flamborough are now located)** and the Petun. Iroquoians were largely hunters and farmers, although they did not domesticate animals.
  - Learn more about the Chonnonton Nation in Flamborough by reading pages 3-6 in the *Extraordinary History of Flamborough*.
- At the time of contact with Europeans, lands in this part of the continent were held **in common**, and worked in common. Hunting was done together, and the catch was divided among members of the village. Longhouses were shared by numerous families within the same clan. **Private property was a foreign concept**.
- Women are important in these societies - families are matrilineal (the family line went through the female line, whose husbands joined the family, while sons who married then joined their wives' families. Women tended the crops and took general charge of village affairs while men were always away hunting or fishing.
- Children were taught to be independent and not submit to overbearing authority. They were taught equality in status and the sharing of possessions. There were no harsh punishments for children.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Revised February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Howard Zinn, "A People's History of the United States," (New York: HarperPerennial, 2003), 20.

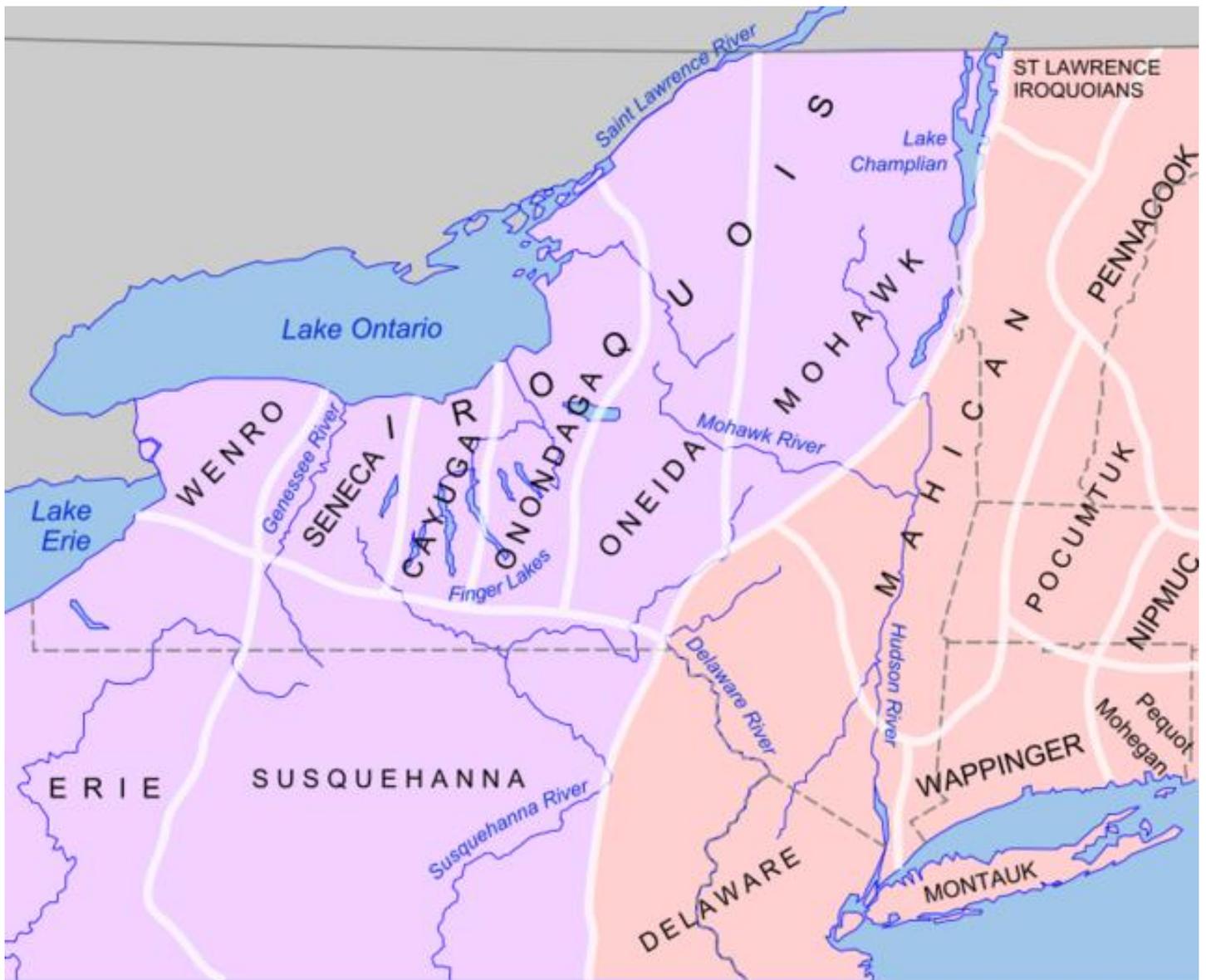
- Slash and burn agriculture was practiced (men would remove the bark from the trees and then burn the brush and dead timber).
- People lived in longhouses clustered in villages of 1500 or more.
- A similar oral history existed throughout the Iroquoian people.



Iroquoian Nations on Turtle Island



The Tree of Peace



NOTE: Haudenosaunee, Six Nations, League of Five Nations, Iroquois, Iroquois Confederacy = all names refer to the same thing.

## The Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Five Nations)

- Families were 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 tribal 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.<sup>3</sup>
- Except for the Tuscarora, Members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy lived in a large stretch of territory in along the southern shore of modern Lake Ontario.

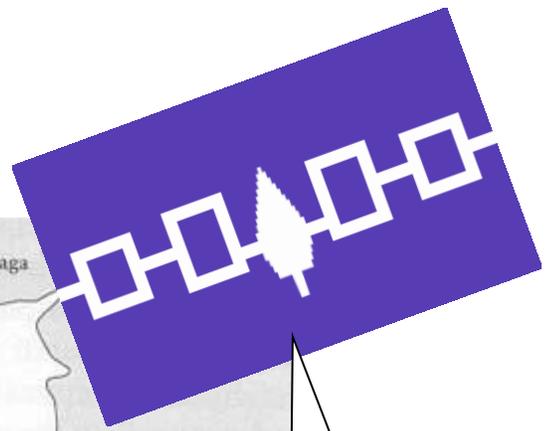
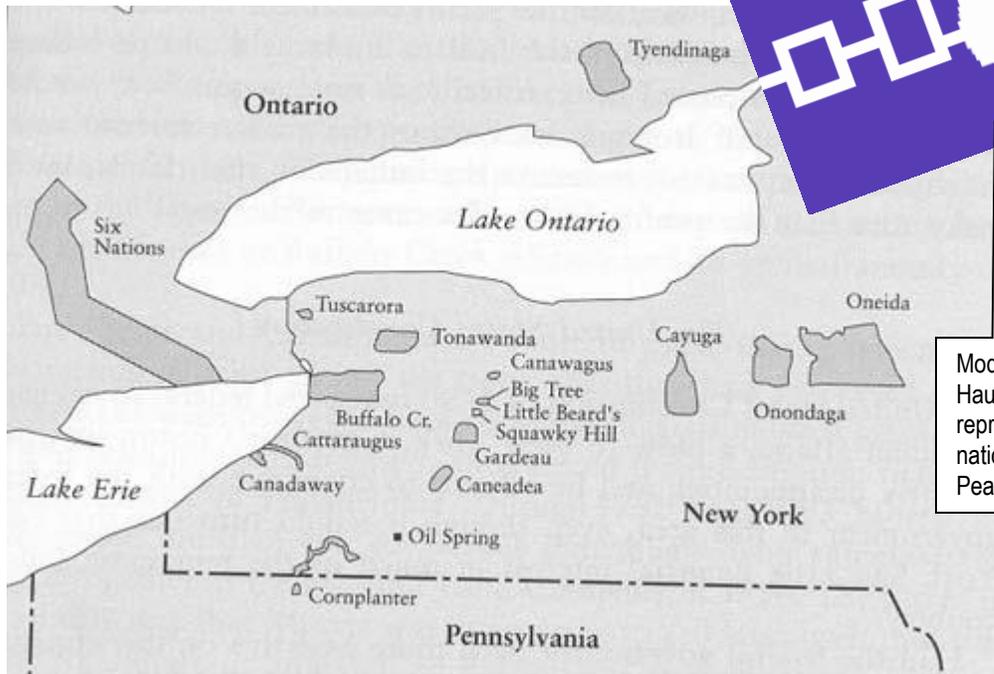
<sup>3</sup> Howard Zinn, "A People's History of the United States," (New York: HarperPerennial, 2003), 20.

- The confederacy included (from east to west) the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca. Each nation maintained its own dialect, villages, and councils.
- The confederacy of the Five Nations 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).
- The League was also known as “the Great Peace,” symbolized by a white pine tree with an eagle hovering over it.
  - In 2015, students from Waterdown District High School participated in the Indigenous commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the end of the War of 1812. Standing in for Canada (the federal government had not sent someone to represent them formally), students presented the Haudenosaunee Confederacy leaders with a string of condolence wampum.<sup>4</sup> Part of the ceremony also included planting a white pine tree on the groups of Dundurn Castle. Representing the Queen, Lieutenant Governor Elizabeth Dowdeswell also participated in this event.
- The Great Peace was governed by a council of fifty chiefs (selected by clan mothers) representing the five nations. Although each nation was not equally represented, each group had one vote, and decisions had to be unanimous.
- The Haudenosaunee Confederacy dealt only with external issues – internal matters were controlled by the internal nations.
- In 1713 the Tuscarora joined the Great Peace, creating the League of Six Nations (an organization that continues to this day, and has been joined by other nations even though it is still called "Six Nations").
  - There is an elected Council for the Six Nations of the Grand River (and other reserves), but the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (encompassing all of the members - regardless of where their reserves may be) remains.

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<sup>4</sup> Please see page 34 in *The Extraordinary History of Flamborough* (Flamborough Heritage Society, 2017).

Where are they now? Answer: Here



Modern flag of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, representing the original five nations that were united by the Peacemaker.

Population: Approximately 45,000 in Canada, 80,000 in the United States [www.sixnations.ca](http://www.sixnations.ca), [www.akwesasne.ca](http://www.akwesasne.ca), [www.mbg-tmt.org](http://www.mbg-tmt.org), [www.oneida.on.ca](http://www.oneida.on.ca)

