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Source: *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association*, 1904, Vol. 4 (1904), pp. 9-18

Published by: Fenimore Art Museum

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42889834>

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## THE IROQUOIS CONFEDERACY.

DR. SHERMAN WILLIAMS.

SOMETIME during the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries an offshoot of the great Dakota family began an eastward movement. These people are commonly spoken of as the Huron-Iroquois, though they are known by other names. The eastward movement was not a rapid one, and there seems to have been several places where they remained for a considerable time; this was especially the case in the Mississippi valley. From this point a portion of the people, whom we know as the Cherokees, moved southward, and occupied the mountain region of eastern Tennessee, northern Georgia, and western North Carolina. About the same time the Tuscaroras and Nottaways settled on the coast of southern Virginia and northern North Carolina.

Save for these diversions the Iroquois people kept together till they reached the Niagara river, from which point they spread out in a fan-shaped movement, covering the country from the Susquehanna river on the south, to the St. Lawrence on the north; but keeping a compact territory. On all sides of them were the Algonquins. It was, so to speak, an Iroquois island in an Algonquin sea.

How early these people broke up into separate nations or tribes is not known; but at this time we find the Onondagas, Oneidas, Mohawks and Hurons moving eastward along the north shore of Lake Ontario. The Hurons settled in the territory between the lake that bears their name and Lake Ontario. Along the northern shore of Lake Erie, and south of the western part of Lake Ontario, were what was known as the Neutral Nation; to the south of them, and south of Lake Erie, were the Eries. The Susquehannocks passed eastward into the valley that bears their name. The Cayugas and Senecas were south of Lake Ontario,

and east of the Eries. The Oneidas, Onondagas and Mohawks kept along the north shore of Lake Ontario, and passed into the valley of the St. Lawrence. The Mohawks were the most numerous and powerful of these tribes and remained longest in that country. Just when the other tribes entered the State of New York is not certain, but the Oneidas settled in this State a considerable time before the Mohawks left Canada. The Onondagas retraced their steps and first settled in New York near Oswego. Not very much is known of the various movements of the Iroquois before their final settlement in this State.

When the Mohawks settled in the valley of the St. Lawrence they made their capital at Quebec. Their kindred, the Hurons, made their capital at Montreal, on the island. They named their capital Hochelaga. At a later period the Mohawks and Hurons engaged in war and the Hurons were driven out and the Mohawks occupied Hochelaga as their capital. It is probable that the Mohawks were at this time at the height of their power. They dominated the country from the lower St. Lawrence valley to the headwaters of the Mohawk. Vermont and the Adirondacks were their hunting grounds. They were continually at war with some of the surrounding tribes. For some reason, not now known, the Hurons and all the northern Algonquin tribes joined in war against the Mohawks. A long and bitter contest followed, which resulted in the expulsion of the Mohawks. It is said that disease and famine were added to the misfortunes of war. Be this as it may they were driven out of the country, and greatly reduced in numbers, and somewhat humbled in spirit, they settled just to the east of their kindred, the Oneidas, in the valley that still bears their name. Just when this occurred is not known, but when Cartier was in Canada, in 1535, he found a Mohawk town at Montreal and when Champlain came, in 1609, the place was deserted; so their expulsion must have occurred between these dates.

The Oneidas were a dependency of the Mohawks and the relation between them must have been close. When the Onondagas entered New York they must have come more or less in contact with the Oneidas who were their neighbors on the east. The same must have been true in regard to their western neighbors,

the Cayugas. The Senecas were as closely related to the Cayugas as were the Mohawks to the Oneidas. It will be seen, therefore, that at this early day it is more than possible that there was some understanding between these kindred people, and that the league may have had its beginning as early as 1450, as is claimed by some writers. It is probable that the growth of such a league among such a rude people as were the Iroquois would be a plant of very slow growth.

It is now generally believed that the league was not fully perfected earlier than 1570.

Doubtless the purpose of the confederacy was to put an end to internal warfare and to strengthen themselves against outside foes. An attempt was made to bring all the Iroquois people into the confederacy, but only the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas joined. They were known as the Five Nations till the Tuscaroras came up from the south and entered the confederacy after which they were spoken of as the Six Nations. The feeling against the Iroquois tribes who would not join the confederacy was very bitter. They were regarded as traitors and pursued as relentlessly as were the Algonquins. They were all ultimately subdued or exterminated.

When the white people first came to this country the Iroquois dominated nearly all the country east of the Mississippi, and from the St. Lawrence on the north to the Gulf of Mexico on the south. Some of the tribes had been practically exterminated, the few survivors being adopted into some one of the Iroquois nations. Other tribes had been conquered. In such cases a few of the Iroquois people usually dwelt with the subjugated people to keep watch upon their actions. On every hand the Iroquois were feared. They had driven the Mohegans into the valley of the Connecticut and so completely broken their spirit, that if a single Iroquois appeared in their country they would flee in terror crying, "A Mohawk! A Mohawk!"

The Iroquois, at this time, had exterminated their old enemies, the Adirondacks, the Algonquin tribe with whom they first came in contact when they entered the valley of the St. Lawrence. The Hurons and the remaining Algonquin tribes on the north kept up a continual war against them.

This was the condition of affairs when, in 1609, Champlain came to Canada. He was very desirous of cultivating friendly relations with the Indians of Canada, so he accompanied a war party of Hurons and Algonquins on an expedition against the Mohawks.

They passed up the Richelieu river and through Lake Champlain to a point near Ticonderoga, where they met a war party of Mohawks largely outnumbering them, but such was the confidence of the Algonquins in Champlain that they did not hesitate to make an attack. In the fight which followed Champlain fired his musket, which he had loaded with slugs, and killed one Mohawk chief and wounded others. His two white companions fired with similar results. It was the first contact of the Iroquois with white men. They were wholly ignorant of fire-arms. It is not to be wondered at that they fled in terror when they saw their companions falling dead without any cause that they could comprehend.

If the shot fired by Champlain was not like that of the embattled farmers at Concord "heard round the world," it, at least, reverberated here for a century and a half, and possibly changed the destinies of a continent. Their defeat at the hands of Champlain rankled in the breasts of the Iroquois. They felt it to be a disgrace that must be washed out at all hazards, and at any cost, but for the time being they felt themselves powerless.

The same year that Champlain passed down the lake that has since borne his name Hudson entered the harbor of New York and passed up the river to the head of navigation. The Dutch settlements soon followed and the Iroquois obtained fire-arms from the Dutch in trade with them, and in course of time became skilled in their use. Thirty-three years after their defeat by Champlain, when, perhaps, not one of the number engaged in the conflict was still living, the Iroquois felt that the time had come to wash the disgrace from their memory, and take full revenge for the insult put upon them. They fitted out a great expedition and invaded Canada. They came near wiping out the French settlements and destroying the Algonquin nation, and very likely would have done so but for the timely arrival of troops from

France. As it was they killed great numbers and took many prisoners, among the number the noted and devoted Jesuit missionary, Father Jogues. This expedition was the beginning of a series of incursions into Canada that were carried on with such persistence and ferocity that a writer of the time says, "A man could neither hunt, fish, fell a tree nor till the soil in all Canada without danger of being murdered by some lurking Iroquois." It was also said that the Iroquois were "the scourge of God upon the aborigines of the continent." They exterminated the Eries, overthrew one Algonquin tribe after another, and finally drove the remaining ones under the walls of Quebec for protection; but even here they were not safe. They drove them out of the valley of the St. Lawrence and pursued them to the shores of Lake Superior where they massacred great numbers of them at a place still known as Point Iroquois.

The Iroquois were good haters and had long memories. An injury was never forgotten nor forgiven. They thought nothing of a journey of a thousand miles, if at the end of it they could satisfy their vengeance. A single Iroquois, or a small party of them, would follow an enemy for days or weeks, waiting and watching for a favorable moment of attack.

They were the strongest, in many ways the noblest, and altogether the most interesting aboriginal people on this continent north of Mexico. They had a strong government, made permanent conquests and established colonies. It is interesting to study some of the causes of their superiority. They were never a numerous people. It is doubtful if their numbers ever reached twenty thousand, but they were by far the most warlike Indians east of the Mississippi. They have been called "The Romans of the West." They proudly called themselves "Ongwe-honwe," "men surpassing all others." They were brave in battle, skilled as diplomats and noted as orators. With them war was the business of life. The council was a recreation, and hunting, fishing and trapping something that had to be done. They had great war captains, like Brant and King Hendrick; noted orators, such as Red Jacket and Logan. Of the latter Jefferson said his appeal to the white race was without a rival.

The location of the Iroquois was an element of power of great consequence. They were situated on high ground where streams had their origin that found their final outlet in the great lakes, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, New York, Delaware and Chesapeake bays, and by the way of the Ohio river, the Mississippi river and the Gulf of Mexico. In their light birch bark canoes, by means of short carries, they could reach, by water, almost any part of the great territory that they dominated. Their attacks could be made so suddenly that their enemies had no warning of their coming, and were, therefore, unprepared to meet them. They held what General Grant once declared to be the military key of the continent.

But neither their location, nor their character, nor both combined, could have made them as pre-eminent as they were without their form of government, which was a most remarkable organization for savages to effect. It resembled our own to a considerable extent. Each nation was a distinct republic so far as its own domestic affairs were concerned, but all were bound together in matters of general interest. Each nation was divided into eight clans known as the Wolf, the Bear, the Beaver, the Turtle, the Deer, the Snipe, the Heron and the Hawk. There were in each nation at least eight principal sachems, one for each clan. In making treaties the sachems affixed to the document a rude drawing of the animal representing their clan. This was called their totem. All told there were fifty sachems divided among the nations as follows: The Onondagas, fourteen; the Cayugas, ten; the Mohawks and Oneidas, nine each, and the Senecas, eight. When the Tuscaroras joined the league they were allowed sachems for their own local affairs, but they were not permitted to become members of the general council and so have a part in the affairs of the confederacy. The fifty sachems constituted what was known as the Council of the League. They combined the legislative, executive and judicial authority of the nation.

The meetings of the council were held annually, in the autumn, at Onondaga. Aside from these regular meetings special meetings might be called at any time or place. The council declared war, made peace, received ambassadors, entered into treaties, in a word decided all matters of political, military, social and reli-

gious action. In order to secure favorable action on any question it was necessary to have an unanimous vote of all the sachems present. In debate a speaker was never interrupted, and there rarely was any heat. Each presented his views in the best manner he could, usually repeating the substance of all that had been said by those who preceded him. This habit frequently made their debates tediously long. Important councils would last for days.

The sachems as a body managed the civil affairs of the league, and the sachems of each nation performed the same service for their respective people. The office of sachem was hereditary, but upon the death of a sachem his successor did not enter upon the duties of his office till he had been "raised" with proper ceremonies by the council. The name as well as the office was hereditary, each sachem bearing the name of his predecessor.

No sachem could, in his official capacity, go to war. If he wished to take part in a war he must, for the time being, lay aside his civil authority.

Aside from the council already mentioned there was, during a portion of the existence of the confederacy, what was known as the Great Council, consisting of one member from each of the nations except the Senecas who were allowed two because of their greater numbers. This council had only advisory powers.

Besides the sachems there were war chiefs chosen because of their merit. This office was not hereditary, nor was the number of chiefs limited. They were the military leaders. When war was declared it was sometimes carried on by means of great expeditions carefully planned by the nation, but more frequently the expeditions were individual matters. Some chief would decide on an expedition and call for volunteers. The party would be large or small, as the chief was capable, and the bitterness toward the enemy was great, or the reverse. If several chiefs set out on an expedition to the same point, each would be independent in his movements, unless some strong will or persuasive personage secured general control for the time being by common consent. It is evident that with this method no large number could be induced to enter upon a war that was not popular.



In this respect the Iroquois had the most democratic government imaginable.

The chiefs achieved their position through their own valor, skill or ability. This class was made up of the best talent of the nation. Practically all the prominent warriors and orators of the Iroquois belonged to it. Logan was the only sachem to make a name in history. Neither the elected war chief nor the hereditary sachem lived in any way better than his fellows. In fact, he frequently was worse off because his position led him to be liberal in the care of others, even to the extent of impoverishing himself. In the Iroquois Confederacy there was no aristocracy, though the sachemship seemed to be of that nature. There was no accumulation of wealth for individual welfare. There was no biting poverty, save when all were poor together.

Here, as has been the case with many civilized nations, the military authority sometimes overruled the civil. The war chiefs from time to time added to their power till they were nearly if not quite equal to the sachems.

The laws governing marriage and descent had an important bearing upon the civil life of the Iroquois. Originally the Wolf, Bear, Beaver and Turtle clans were regarded as brothers, as were also the Deer, Snipe, Heron and Hawk clans. All marriages were between members of the first group with members of the second.

Not only was one forbidden to marry one belonging to his clan or group of clans, but he must not marry a member of his own tribe, though belonging to the other group of clans. This custom was greatly modified as time went on, but at no time could one marry a member of his own clan, and it was not common to marry a member of the same tribe. This practice bound the nations firmly together with the ties of kinship.

The line of descent was through the woman instead of the man as in our case. A son could inherit neither title nor property from his father, it going to the father's brother or other relative instead. All inheritance came through the mother. This resulted in a very democratic distribution. When a woman married she took her husband home to her tribe and clan, but he never became a

member of either, though his children did. While, in many ways, the wife was the slave of her husband, doing nearly all the hard work of the house, and tilling the fields, yet she ruled the house, and if her husband proved lazy and did not do his share in providing for his family, or for the general welfare, she might at any time order him to take his blanket and leave. If he was wise he obeyed the order. After all life bore quite as severely upon the men as upon the women. They hunted for food, spent long seasons in the severe work of trapping and protected their territory from their enemies.

All the property of the men except the arms he used, belonged to the wife. The women, old men and boys cultivated the soil and gathered the fuel. Owing to warfare and the hard life led by the men, the women were more numerous than the men in all the tribes. In the lodge the Indian was a man of few words. He acknowledged the woman's right to rule there. If she was offended the Indian smiled. If he was offended he walked out.

There was no individual ownership of land. Changes of location were quite frequent. In the course of ten or a dozen years the bark covering of their houses would become rotten, the whole house would be infested with vermin, the soil would become somewhat exhausted, and available fire wood would become scarce.

The change of location involved much hard work. Their tools were rude and few in number. Everything had to be carried by hand. Land must be cleared, and they had no tools of metal. Houses must be erected and the work of constructing the frames, stripping and drying the bark was a slow and laborious process for a people with their limited facilities for work.

The Indians had no family names. A single name was given when young and was replaced by another at maturity. Power to change the name at maturity rested primarily with the chief, but it might be done by mother, brother or sister, but never by the father. It was usually done without the consent or even knowledge of the person concerned. An Iroquois was never addressed by his name, but always as "my brother" or "my uncle."

The Iroquois long house was wholly unlike the houses of any other Indians. It was made by setting two double parallel rows

of saplings in the ground and bending their tops together. The ends were made in the same way. This slender frame work was strengthened by binding to it other saplings at right angles to the first. The frame was then covered with strips of bark laid as we lay shingles, but the strips of bark were much larger than shingles. The bark of the elm tree was generally used. The strips of bark were held in place by having saplings bound across them. Strings and ropes made of the fibre of bark were used in the construction of the houses. The long house was from eighteen to twenty-four feet wide and from thirty to one hundred, and sometimes even more, feet in length. On the inside they were arranged something like a sleeping car with the berths made up but the curtains left out. In the longer houses there were cross partitions about every twenty feet. In each section there would be eight bunks, four on each side. These places were used for sleeping at night, in the daytime for sitting. Some of them were at all times used for store rooms. Corn, braided in trusses, hung from the ceiling. Other supplies were suspended in the same manner. There was a fire on the floor in the center of the apartment. The smoke escaped through a hole in the roof. It has been commonly supposed that there were as many families in a house as there were sets of apartments, but recent writers have questioned this. They suppose that as a rule there was only one family in a house, the additional room being for storage of supplies or other purposes.

There is much else of which I would like to speak, the games, industries, inventions, morals, religion and feasts of the Iroquois, and especially of their use of wampum, but I fear I have already exceeded the time allotted me.

I do, however, in closing, want to make a plea for the study of the lives of these people in our schools. They were the original inhabitants of our great State. They stood as a bulwark for the protection of the early settlers against the French and Algonquins. But for them the settlement of our State would have been greatly delayed, and it is quite probable that this country, at least most of our State, and the great northwest, would have been French in manners, customs and laws, if not in race.