

ALLIES AND ENEMIES

Seneca are among the most respected and feared. The Seneca are culturally similar to their Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk confederates. The five tribes were known as the Five Nations or the League of Five Nations. Sometime between 1715 and 1722 the Tuscaroras from North Carolina joined the confederacy and changed the name to the Six Nations.

In their relations with white settlers the Seneca played the role of an independent power and were this way from the very start. During the colonial period they held the balance of power between the French and English. Particularly around the Canadian border. The Seneca opposed the extension of French settlement southwards from Canada, and were responsible for preventing the English colonies from being forced on the west by the French.

During the American Revolution the Seneca sided with the British.

SOCIETY

Each town in the tribe contained several long, bark covered communal houses that had both tribal and political significance. Inside each house several families lived in semi-private rooms or areas and the center areas were used as social and political meeting places. They lived in scattered villages that were organized by a system of matrilineal clans.

A calendar cycle of ceremonies reflected their agricultural, hunting, and gathering. The men hunted, cleared fields, traded and made war. The woman gathered various wild plant foods and tended gardens.

They had a great agricultural economy. Their main crop was corn, but they also grew pumpkins, beans, tobacco, maize, squash and later on they grew orchard fruits like apples and peaches.

Crafts were also made. Fine pottery, splint baskets, mats of corn husk and used wampum as a medium of exchange.

FAMOUS TRIBE MEMBERS

There were many famous Indians from the Seneca tribe.

Ely S. Parker- His Indian name was Donehogawa. He was a Seneca Indian of the Wolf clan. Parker served under President Ulysses S. Grant on the Board of Indian Commissioners. For a while he lived in the Canadian woods under traditional Iroquoian style. Parker served as military secretary to General Grant. Parker came under attack in an investigation in the Bureau of Indian Affairs about corruption. Government records say he was thrown out he had really resigned his position. Parker was also the author of a book called The Character of Grant.

Red Jacket- Red Jacket was a Seneca chief know for his strong personality, and political shrewdness. Sagoyewatha was his Indian name. He had the ability to stay uncommitted even in crises like John Sullivan's raids on Iroquois settlements in 1779. He greatly opposed land sales to settlers, but to gain his people's support he secretly sold land to keep esteem among the white people. When the Seneca were put into the Revolutionary War in support of the British, Red Jacket proved to be a very unenthusiastic warrior. He earned himself the name Red Jacket from wearing the British's red coat. During the War of 1812 he fought on the American side against the British.

Cornplanter- Cornplanter was a famous Seneca Indian chief and statesman, who during the American Revolution led his warriors against the colonists in many important campaigns. He was half-brother of the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake. Cornplanter eventually accepted the outcome on the war and became a great supporter of the United States.

WORKS CITED PAGE

HISTORY

The Seneca Indians were an Iroquoian speaking North American Indian tribe. They were traditionally living between the Genesee River and Seneca Lake in what is now New York State.

The Seneca were in a league called the Six Nations. The other members were Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora. The date that the tribes formed is unknown although it is believed to be in the early 16th century. According to the Iroquois legend the league was founded by Deganawidah, a leader of high status. He had persuaded the original Five Nations to give up intertribal warfare marked by bloody feud and cannibalism.

The prophet Hiawatha who was Deganawidah's spokesman traveled among the five tribes in an attempt to unify them. His persistence was successful and when the tribes united it was almost an invulnerable political alliance until its collapse during the American Revolution. Warfare and raids against tribes outside of the league gave opportunities for young Iroquois warriors to earn prestige and honor.

The gaining of economic and political advantages were only of a second importance to the tribes. Eventually though dealing with the British, French and the colonists the league let opposing parties fight against one another while they attacked neighboring enemy tribes for economic and territorial gains. Before the collapse of the league in the late 18th century the Iroquois league dominated land as far west as the Mississippi River.

The league was modeled after family, clan, and community organizations. They were not only to unite its members through symbolic relations but to maintain peace through individual tribe members.

HISTORY (con't)

The league had a Grand Council. It was made up of 50 members, who were life-appointed males, or peace chiefs. They were nominated by the head woman of each tribe. The Onondaga consisted of 14 members, the Cayuga 10, the Oneida and Mohawk each had 9 and the Seneca with 8. The council members were responsible for keeping peace within the tribes, representing the league to outsiders, and planning tribal activities in warfare against nonmembers.

Major decisions were reached the unanimity because of unequal tribe representation. Any member of the Grand Council could be thrown out by impeachment from his tribe's headwoman. Many historians say that the democratic organization of the Iroquois League could have been used as a model for the makers of the United States Constitution.

Today's members of the Seneca live at the Tonawanda, Allegany, and Cattaraugus reserves in New York, and at the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario.

THESIS PAGE

The Seneca Indians. Who were they and what did they do? Who were their friends and foes? The history of the Iroquoian tribe is of great importance to the history of our nation. How they participated in our wars and who they had sided for could have determined the outcome and the ways of our country.

CONCLUSION PAGE

The Seneca Indians were a great tribe. Through themselves and five other tribes they formed the Six Nations. The Six Nations were an almost indomitable clan. They participated in the Revolutionary War and in the colonial wars. They tried to keep the French from coming down from Canada into the now United States.

The Seneca had a great agricultural and hunting economy. The men and women each had specific jobs they were to do in order to keep things running.

The Seneca was the tribe that was the most intensely studied by the white people. It is also believed that their democratic ways were an influence on the writers of the United States Constitution.

Many of the famous Indians came from the Seneca tribe. Some were Red Jacket, Ely S. Parker and Cornplanter. There were also many others from their league tribes, the Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and later joiners the Tuscarora.