



DID YOU KNOW

The Iroquoians lived in villages surrounded by palisades which provided a defence against enemies. There were as many as thirty houses in the largest villages, each capable of sheltering fifteen or twenty families. The houses were shaped like barns, with walls and gabled roofs of cedar or elm bark laid over a framework of poles. At either end there was a doorway, and down both sides a row of cubicles, each the home of a family. In summer the residents slept on benches against the walls. For greater warmth in winter they used sleeping mats spread on the floor near the family fires which were located along the centre aisle of the house.

Furniture consisted of clay cooking-pots, paddles for stirring corn and berries, ladles and bowls of bark and wood, bark chests for storage of corn, mortars and pestles for grinding it, and baskets, sleeping mats and skins. Tools consisted of stone-bladed axes and knives, wooden drills for punching holes in wood, bark and skin, and bone scrapers for dressing skins. Iroquoian mothers carried their babies in wooden cradles.

The Iroquoians traded among themselves and with the Algonquian tribes beyond their borders. The Tobacco Indians raised enormous quantities of tobacco for trading purposes, and the Hurons traded corn with the Ojibway for furs, birch-bark canoes and medicinal remedies. Wampum was used in trade. It meant prosperity,

peace and goodwill, and purple wampum symbolized death; personal decoration, currency, records (in the form of strings joined together), and the ratification of treaties (in the form of belts and sashes).

The native boats of the Iroquoians were rather crude dugouts although some had birch bark canoes purchased from the Algonquins. They generally travelled on foot and in winter with the aid of snowshoes. They carried burdens in wicker baskets suspended from the forehead by a wide strap. Warriors often carried a long cord of plaited fibre to serve as a pack-strap and for tying captured prisoners.

From childhood the Iroquoians were trained as warriors. The possession of corn enabled them to remain in the field for a longer period and in greater numbers than their enemies who had to disperse to hunt and fish after a few days. The early weapons were knobbed wooden clubs, sometimes fitted with stone spikes, and the bow and arrow. After the Europeans came tomahawks were used. Many warriors wore armour of wooden slats and carried wooden shields covered with rawhide, but this equipment was useless after the Indians obtained firearms.

The Iroquoians had a genius for political organization. The Huron and Neutral Nations of south-eastern Ontario were confederations of tribes governed by elected councils. The Five Nations or League of the Iroquois had a governing council of fifty sachems or Chiefs who met several times a year to appoint and receive embassies to decide on questions of war and peace and to discuss other matters of concern to the confederacy. The Iroquois traced their descent through their mothers, and the head of each family was the eldest woman in the group. She, in consultation with other women, elected the sachem.