

Collectively this group is interesting for many reasons. First, they had developed and continue to retain a fascinating culture. Thanks to the most famous American ethnography, *League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee or Iroquois*, by Lewis Henry Morgan,<sup>2</sup> it is widely known that the Iroquois were a matrilineal society with a sophisticated political organization patterned essentially upon the social organization. Thus, the important involvement of women in Iroquois society and politics has long been emphasized. Second, the Iroquois played a significant role overall in American history, for they figured crucially in the colonial wars, the fur trade, and the American Revolution. Even the War of 1812 saw both the newly born nation and Great Britain vying for Iroquois allegiance, each side attempting to enlist Iroquois warriors to its own advantage. For at least two centuries, therefore, Iroquois chiefs had an opportunity to play off rivals in order to benefit from a balancing of powers, while Iroquois warriors gave force to these policies by backing threats with armed attacks on enemies. Third, and happily for the ethnohistorian, the Six Nations are a well documented people making it possible to infer about social changes from the time of contact to the present. In addition, there exists a rich literature on the Huron, an Iroquoian people who exhibited cultural patterns akin to those still seen among contemporary Iroquois.<sup>3</sup> The seventy-three volumes of the Jesuit Relations<sup>4</sup> from 1610 to 1791 are especially valuable in providing a fully documented date-line. By examining the social organization, the religion, and the status of women reported in the Jesuit Relations, one can appreciate the extent of cultural conservatism as well as cultural innovation since that time.

For purposes of analysis it is convenient to identify several historical periods: the pre-contact period; the early contact period, when European influence was still small; the colonial period, up to and including the American Revolution; the post-Revolutionary period of general dislocation, concluding with confinement on reservations; and the reservation period. The last should in turn be subdivided into that period when most Iroquois did indeed inhabit the reservations and the post-World War II period in which more and more people moved to urban areas as their primary place of residence. Since each of these periods presented the Iroquois with different problems, it is only natural that there should have been distinctive responses in social organization, religion, and the role of women. This article will trace some of the changing responses and will attempt to give structural and psychological explanations for the direction of the changes, particularly of those pertaining to women and their religious participation.