

Woodland Natives



Pocahontas, an Algonquian of the Woodlands Region, married a European and lived in London for 7 months before returning home.

The Algonquin lived in two areas: around the Great Lakes, and near the Atlantic Ocean. The Wampanoag nation were the first tribe that Europeans met when they came to America. Both the Illini and Potawatomi, tribes that lived in Illinois long ago, were part of the Algonquin language group.

In 1570, the League of the Iroquois was formed from five tribes: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The Tuscarora tribe joined in 1772, and it became the Six Nations. This group of people lived in what is now New York state. The Iroquois call themselves the Hodenosaunee, which means "People of the Longhouse".

Land & Animals



Ojibwa women gathering wild rice

The Northeast culture area consists of the temperate-climate regions of what is now the eastern United States and southeastern Canada.

The region stretches east from the Mississippi River Valley across the Appalachian Mountains to the Atlantic seaboard. In the east the region encompasses the portion of the Atlantic Coast that extends from southeastern Canada to the Chesapeake Bay region in Maryland and Virginia. Inland it includes the northern Appalachian chain, which runs in a north-south direction and creates a natural barrier.

In the north central part of the culture area are the large inland bodies of water known as the Great Lakes.



Hundreds of rivers flow throughout the Northeast, and much of the soil, especially in the valleys, is suitable for agriculture. Although generally humid, the climate is varied, like the terrain, with the lengths of the four seasons determined by latitude and altitude. The Northeast culture area is sometimes referred to as Northeast Woodlands because of the widespread forests, including broadleaf hardwoods and coniferous evergreens. Sometimes the area is grouped with the Southeast culture area and referred to as the Eastern Woodlands.

People & Languages

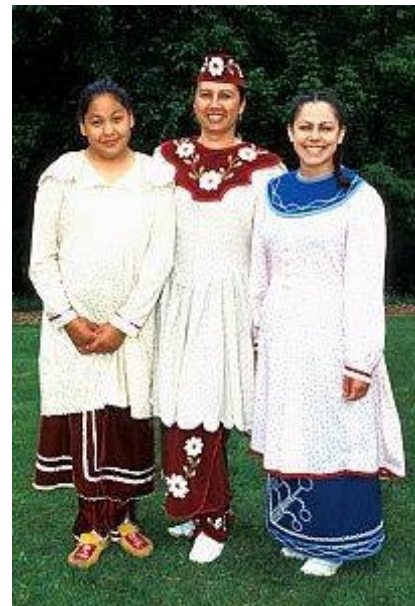


Male Iroquois Dancer

At the time of European contact, two great lines of people of two major language families lived in the Northeast: Algonquian-speaking peoples and Iroquoian-speaking peoples. These peoples can be organized into five major groups. In addition, there were many other smaller tribes and bands that maintained distinct political identities.

Fifth were the New York and Ontario Iroquoian tribes. These included the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, and Seneca—referred to collectively as Iroquois (Haudenosaunee)—and the Erie, Huron, Neutral, and Tobacco.

The first of the five groups was the Algonquian peoples of Nova Scotia, New England, Long Island, Hudson Valley, and the Delaware Valley. The largest tribes of this group were the Abenaki, Delaware (Lenni Lenape), Mahican, Maliseet, Massachuset, Mi'kmaq (Micmac), Mohegan, Montauk, Narragansett, Nipmuc, Pennacook, Pequot, Wampanoag, and Wappinger. Second were the Chesapeake Bay and Cape Hatteras tribes, including the Algonquian Nanticoke, Powhatan, and Secotan. Also in this group were the Iroquoian Susquehannock and Tuscarora (the latter tribe eventually migrating northward and settling among other Iroquoians). Third were the Great Lakes Algonquian tribes. These included the Algonquin, Menominee, Ottawa, Potawatomi, and some bands of Ojibwa (Chippewa), along with the Siouan-speaking Winnebago (Ho-Chunk). Fourth were the Prairie Algonquian tribes, including the Fox (Mesquakie), Illinois, Kickapoo, Miami, Sac (Sauk), and Shawnee.



Onondaga ladies from Syracuse New York dressed in traditional Iroquois calico dresses

Food & Housing

Some Northeast Indians maintained permanent villages. Other peoples were seminomadic, changing village sites depending on food availability. They made clearings in the woods, usually near streams or rivers, and sometimes surrounded them with *palisades* (tall walls made from sharpened logs stuck upright in the earth) for defensive purposes. Two types of houses were common in the Northeast: the Iroquoian longhouse and the Algonquian wigwam. The region's vast forests provided the main building materials for these shelters.

The Iroquoians built *longhouses*, communal dwellings capable of housing a dozen or more families. Longhouses had pointed or rounded roofs and doors at both ends. The buildings were constructed with post-and-beam and bent sapling frames and usually covered with sheets of elm bark. Raised platforms were used for sleeping. Smoke holes in the roofs allowed smoke from open fires to escape.



Algonquian peoples generally lived in smaller structures known as *wigwams*. Only one family lived in a wigwam. Wigwams were domed or cone-shaped dwellings consisting of pole frames overlaid with birchbark or elm bark, reed mats, or animal hides, depending on what materials were available. They were typically built over a shallow pit, with earth piled around the base. Fires in the center provided a source of heat and light. Longhouses were sometimes used as council or ceremonial buildings.



Clothing & Jewelry

The woodland people dressed in clothes made from the skin of animals. Deerskin was most commonly used. In hot weather, men wore breechcloths. When it got colder, they added deer-skin shirts, leggings, moccasins and sometimes fur robes.



Women wore wrap skirts, shirts, leggings and moccasins. Sometimes the clothes were beaded in beautiful colors.

Clothing was made from the pelts (animal skin with the hair or fur still on it) of animals they ate. The Iroquois, for example, wore shirts, leggings, dresses, skirts, breechcloths, and moccasins made of buckskin (animal skin without the fur or hair) during the winter.



The women wore skirts woven out of wild grass and covered with furs. They wore leggings underneath. During the hot weather, men only wore a loincloth (a small piece of buckskin between their legs and tucked into a belt) and woman wore their grass dresses. Children wore nothing .

Northeast Indians also made robes and mittens from beaver and bear fur. To decorate clothing they used feathers, shells, stones, paint, and porcupine-quill embroidery. Sometimes they used paint for body decoration or adorned their faces with tattoos, although tattooing was not as prevalent as in the Southeast culture area.

The Algonquians and Iroquoians placed a high value on *wampum*, an Algonquian term that refers to small beads made from shells, or the strings, belts, or sashes made from these beads.



Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples used beads to decorate tools and weapons, and as jewelry. They also used belts of wampum with beads arranged in pictographs for keeping tribal records and to communicate messages of peace or war to other tribes. Some tribes used wampum belts in religious and kinship ceremonies.

Prior to European contact, wampum sometimes served as a medium of exchange, although its other cultural functions were more significant. The Europeans began making wampum out of glass beads for trade purposes—especially for the fur trade—and it eventually became used as a form of money. Native Americans also began making wampum from European glass beads.

Face paint was a big deal to Woodland Indians. They wore it to express feelings each color meant something: red = life, black = death or eternal grief and purple = royalty) and for special occasions. Before going to war, they painted themselves, performed magical rites and took special medicines. Several of the tribes performed many songs and rites. They used special equipment that they thought helped them talk to their gods. They also wore masks to cure diseases. The scary masks were supposed to scare the evil spirit out of the sick person.

Did you know?

Here's one hairstyle you won't see come back in style. Woodland Indians pulled or plucked out most of their hair except for a square or round patch that covered the crown or top part of the head!



Religion & Ceremonies



Northeast Indians believed in a spirit world that interacted with the physical, or natural, world. This included belief in a primary spirit, a great animating force that pervaded all existence. Algonquians called this animating force *Kitche Manitou* (“Great Spirit”), or simply *Manitou*, and by other names depending on language dialects.

The Iroquoian version of *Manitou* is known as *Orenda*, among other names, and Siouans referred to it by variations on *Wakan*, or *Wakanda*.

According to indigenous beliefs, the Great Spirit had many manifestations. It was believed to be present in all things—animals, plants, water, rocks, and other natural phenomena, such as the Sun, Moon, weather, or sickness. Lesser manifestations of the Great Spirit were sometimes referred to as *manitous* or by other names, such as *Thunderbird*, *Bringer of Rain*. Shamans were believed to be capable of controlling these spirits.

When someone in a Woodland tribe died, the tribe would hold a cry ceremony. The chief sang and danced around the fire. This ceremony lasted for five days. The day before it started, five knots were tied in a piece of milkweed. Every day of the ceremony they untied a knot.

Apart from a general belief in the Great Spirit, Algonquian tribes had different legends and believed in different supernatural beings. Some of these beings were considered heroes or guardian spirits, such as *Manebozho*, the Great Hare, who, according to the legends of the Ojibwa and other Algonquian tribes, remade the world after bad spirits had destroyed it in a flood.

Medicine societies, composed of practitioners skilled in the arts of healing, were important among many Northeast peoples. These societies sought the help of the spirit world and dispensed herbal cures to ward off disease and heal the sick.

Members of the False Face Society of the Iroquois wore wooden masks known as *false faces*. The masks, which represented spirits known as *Faces of the Forest*, were carved on a living tree. Then a ceremony of prayer and tobacco offering was held while the masks were cut from the trunk. The masks were believed to frighten away malevolent spirits that caused illness, and False Face dances were performed to heal the sick.