

# THE LONGHOUSE

Longhouses are long and narrow bark covered houses that the Haudenosuanees (People of the Longhouse), also known as the Iroquois, lived in until the latter part of the 1800's.

These homes contained one large extended family, making all the women and children living in a longhouse all of the same clan. Longhouses had two doors and no windows, one door was located on each end of the longhouse. Numerous longhouses in one area created a village. The Haudenosuanees village was sometimes protected from intruders by having a palisade (an 18 ft. tall wooden fence) around the entire area. The Haudenosuanees planted gardens around their homes for sustenance and a way to keep yard maintenances and bugs down.

The Longhouse is constructed using a wooden pole framework, long poles are vertically set into the ground with a Y fork at the top (see fig 2). These long poles are set to form a large rectangle that is spaced approximately 4 to 5 feet apart and stands 10 feet tall (see fig. 1). Poles are laid horizontally onto the top of the Y forked foundation and tied into place with wooden splints or rope made from slippery elm or bass wood fibers (see fig. 3) To make the foundation strong, long poles are placed horizontally along the upright poles and tied into place (see fig.3). The roof is created by bending and tying into place young sapling elm tree poles (see fig. 4). To make the roof framework stronger, horizontal cross beams are tied into place (see fig 4). The roof is between 5 to 10 feet tall making the overall height of the longhouse about 15 to 20 feet tall. The roof is angled (slanted) to assure that rain and heavy snows will not accumulate and damage the roof.

Once the framework is created and secured, the Haudenosuanees use elm or black ash bark "shingles" to cover the outside of the Longhouse such as siding to keep the people from the elements. After the elm or black ash trees are harvested, the bark is carefully removed in sheets that are a few feet in height and about 6 feet wide.

The Longhouse  
by Kanatiyosh@aol.com



fig. 1



fig. 2

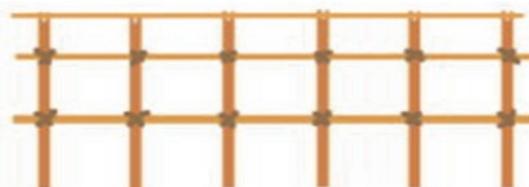


fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5

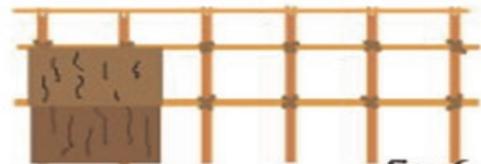


fig. 6



The bark is laid out and flattened and treated with animals oils. Once the bark is prepared, the bark shingles are tied into place on the upright pole framework using bark rope (see fig 5).

The bark shingles are overlapped to keep the rain and snow from coming inside the finished longhouse (see fig.5). An outer framework of poles are placed over the bark shingles and tied together to finish off the construction of the longhouse. This outer framework made the structure stronger and further secured the elm bark into place.

The same technique is used to cover the roof. However, when covering the roof, a smoke hole directly over every fire pit within the longhouse is left open. This is done to allow the smoke to pass through the longhouse. It is said that the Smoke Dance, which is still done today as a social dance, originated out of the need of the people to remove the smoke from the inside of the longhouse. The dancers help the smoke to rise and leave through the hole in the roof.



### DIMENSIONS AND WHO LIVED INSIDE THE LONGHOUSE

A longhouse is approximately 15 to 20 feet in height, 20 feet wide, including the door opening, and could be anywhere from 40 feet to 200 feet long. The length of each longhouse depended on how many daughters the elder mother, mother of the clan who lived in the longhouse had. A longhouse might start out short, but could easily be made longer to accommodate her married daughter's husband and their children. The Haudenosaunee are a matrilineal society, which means that the clan that one belongs to is passed on from women to their children. One is not allowed to marry a person in the same clan.

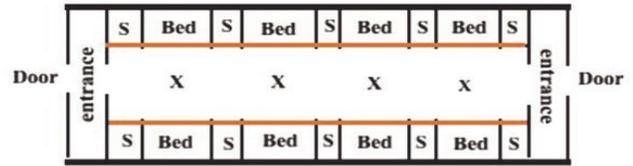
When a daughter married her husband, who would have a different clan than his wife, he would come to live in the longhouse of her mother. When this couple had children, the children would have the clan of the mother. A husband did not lose his clan and become the clan of the wife, rather he lived with his wife in the house of her mother and retained his mother's clan.

The inside dimensions of the longhouse were very interesting. The elder mother and her husband and each of the daughter's families had their own living area within the longhouse. The living area consisted of: storage spaces (marked on the diagram with a S), a platform that was a foot off the ground and approximately 13 feet long and 6 feet wide formed the bed and sitting area, and an upper common platform that ran the length of the longhouse (shown in a brown line on the diagram) could be used to sleep on or for storage.

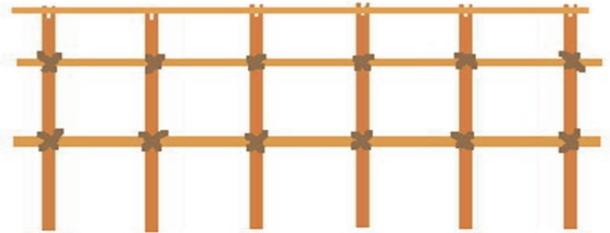
The lower platform was set a foot off the ground to protect the people from the dampness of the floor, mats made from cornhusk, or other woven plant fibers were laid on the platforms to sleep on. Hides and furs were also used to lay on, and were used to keep the people warm. The upper platform that was used for sleeping and storage would hold items like braided corn and medicine plants for drying or that could be hung from the rafters until needed.



Longhouse Floor Plan



by Kanatiyosh@aol.com 2000©



10 feet tall forked top poles

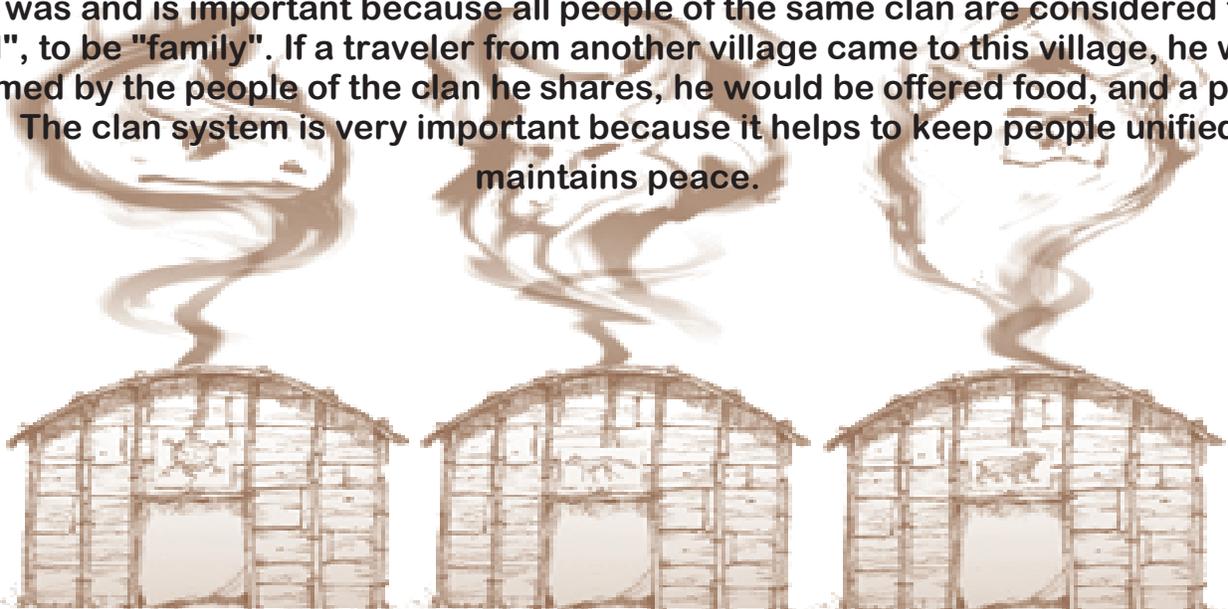
Things such as dishes made from bark or hand carved bowls and spoons were stored in their living areas. Also, bows and arrows, blow guns and other tools and ceremonial items could be hung from the rafters or stored on the upper platform.

Within the storage area, the Haudenosaunee used elm bark containers to store food items like dried corn, beans, and squash (also known as the Three Sisters). The elm bark containers helped to keep the dried food items from getting moldy and ruined. Wood for the fire pits were stored in this area too. Dried meats were also kept in bark containers and hung in the rafters. Also, if a family had many children, sometimes they would build a sleeping platform in the storage area for a child.

The doors, entrances, and the area around the fire were common areas (used by all people within the longhouse). The X in the diagram represents the fire pits that were used by the families on each side of the fire to cook and as a source of light and heat.

Above the door of each longhouse was carved or painted the symbol that represented the clan of the people who lived inside. When visitors came to the village, they would know right away what clan lived in a longhouse. For example, if there was a turtle painted above the door way. it would mean people of the Turtle Clan lived in that particular longhouse.

This was and is important because all people of the same clan are considered to be "related", to be "family". If a traveler from another village came to this village, he would be welcomed by the people of the clan he shares, he would be offered food, and a place to rest. The clan system is very important because it helps to keep people unified and maintains peace.



The Iroquois Confederacy is composed of six nations. Each nation has clans. A person's clan is the same as their mother's clan. The members of each clan are all related to each other through their mothers. This is called a matrilineal system. Each clan is represented by a different animal. Traditionally a person would not marry someone within the same clan.

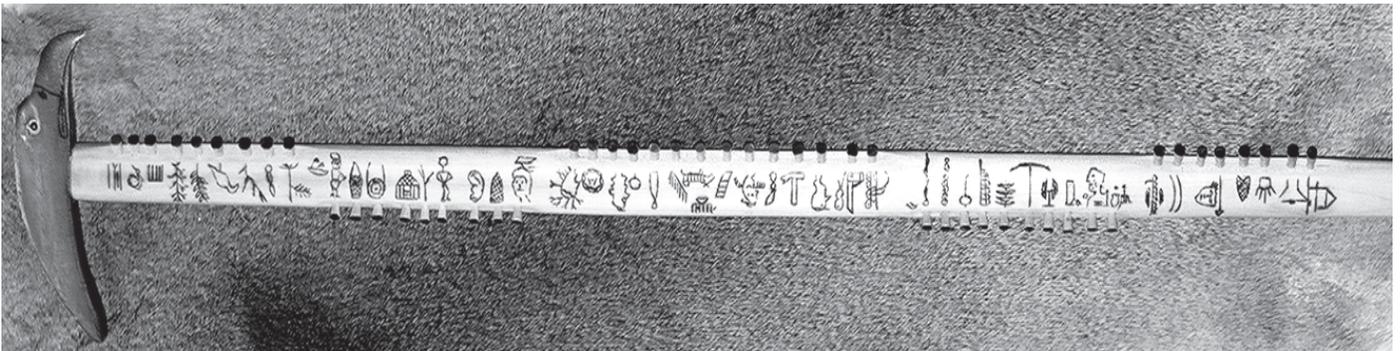
There are presently nine clans divided into animals from three earth elements: Land, Air, and Water. The water creatures are the turtle, beaver, and the eel. The land creatures are the deer, wolf, and bear. The creatures of the sky are the hawk, heron, and snipe.

The natural world is symbolized by these beings.

Prior to the Peacemaker, there were numerous other clans such as sweet potato, rock, and ball. After the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy, the number of clans was reduced to the nine represented today.

All of the Six Nations have members from the Bear, Wolf, and Turtle clan while some nations also have members from some or all of the remaining 6 clans. Clans are headed by clan mothers. Their duties include: choosing the chiefs, reminding the chiefs of their duties, giving clan names to children, distributing the goods of those who have died, and meeting obligations to medicine societies. They can remove a chief from office when necessary. The clan system flourishes today among those who follow the traditional system, but most Iroquois of all faiths identify themselves as members of a particular clan. In the traditional government, chiefs are responsible to help those in their clans. The clan mothers appoint the chiefs and evaluate their dedication to those who are yet to come, the seventh generation.

As a mark of their identity today many Iroquois wear, display in their homes, or use as part of their signature, their clan animal symbol.



### THE LONGHOUSE AND SYMBOLISM

Today when you see a picture drawn of a longhouse, the artist usually draws the longhouse with 5 smoke holes in the roof. The artist does this to symbolically represent the founding of the Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois) Confederacy, which originally included Five Nations. The Five Nations are as follows: The Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. These Five Nations accepted the Great Law of Peace from the Peacemaker and joined together, in peace as like one longhouse. In approximately 1714, the Tuscarora Nation joined the Haudenosaunee and made the Confederacy of Six Nations strong.

