

In 1609, Henry Hudson and Samuel de Champlain discovered people as well as bodies of water. Those people had discovered the Hudson River and Lake Champlain many centuries earlier.

Archaeologists believe that Native Americans first occupied the territory of New York State following the retreat of Ice Age glaciers around 10,000 B.C. Spear points provide evidence for the earliest settlements, while discoveries of more sophisticated tools and crafts reveal the development of distinct cultures.

Downstate, Henry Hudson encountered bands of the Lenape or Delaware people, who had encountered Giovanni da Verrazano nearly 100 years earlier in New York Bay. Champlain befriended the Huron people, a confederacy of four tribes whose ancestors had lived north of the modern New York border since around 500 A.D. He joined the Hurons (also known as the Wendats) in a war against the strongest force in northern New York, the Iroquois Confederacy.

Delawares, Hurons and Iroquois had diverse economies that included agriculture, hunting and trade. They lived in villages longhouses, multi-family dwellings with discrete apartments for each family unit. Both the Hurons and Iroquois were confederacies of different clans and tribes, with the Iroquois in particular practicing a sophisticated form of government that some seen as a role model for the thirteen American colonies that formed the United States.

According to Iroquois history, the original Five Nations - the Cayuga, the Mohawks, the Oneida, the Onondaga and the Seneca, - had always been at war with one another before the coming of "the Peacemaker." Possibly

between the 14th and 16th centuries, the Peacemaker and his ally Hiawatha spread the idea of a "Great Peace" and confederacy to the five nations. The Iroquois Confederacy became the "Six Nations" with the adoption of the Tuscarora people in the 1720s.

The Confederacy (known as the Haudenosaunee) governed through regular gatherings in the Onondaga country, of sachems elected by the elder women of each tribe. The Onondaga served as "fire keepers" and supervised deliberations among the "elder brother" and "younger brother" tribes. The goal was to reach a consensus all the nations could agree upon. When there was no consensus, each nation was free to pursue its own trade strategies or alliances with the European powers.

All the major nations were trading peoples. They exchanged goods with one another, but sometimes raided each other as well. They were immediately interested in European manufactured metal goods. The Europeans - British, Dutch, French and others, - were just as interested in beaver pelts and deerskins.

The Iroquois eventually became the dominant power in the Mohawk Valley, controlling the easiest routes to the richest fur territories to the west. Meanwhile, the Huron became middlemen between the French and natives further north. While the Iroquois and Huron were already rivals before Europeans arrived on the scene, competition for trade intensified their rivalry. The struggle for dominance climaxed in the mid-17th century, when the Iroquois attacked and scattered or assimilated most of the Hurons. The surviving Hurons later formed the Wyandot people.

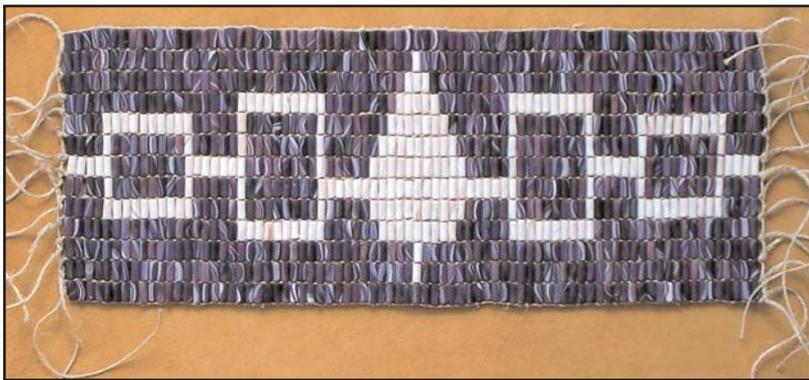
The fur trade with European colonists eventually endangered native societies. In many cases, a preference for European products led to the loss of traditional native crafts. Increased dependence on European goods compelled natives to focus on fur trapping at the

expense of agriculture and other forms of commerce.

Many tribes also felt the traumatic effect of European diseases like smallpox. Natives lacked immunity to these new plagues that killed as many as two-thirds of some tribes' populations.

Depopulation through disease worsened losses of traditional skills and made the native people even more dependent on European trade, while Europeans grew more determined to take the land for themselves.

The Delawares fought repeated wars with the Dutch colonists of New Netherland. Many had already fled the region by the time the British took over the renamed New



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## Native People of New York

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York colony. The Iroquois maintained a superior position for many more years, thanks to their strategic location and skillful diplomacy with the British and French.

Unfortunately, the French defeat in the Seven Years' War and the British defeat in the Revolutionary War left the Iroquois virtually defenseless against land-hungry Americans.

The native nations of New York were eventually relegated to reservations but the Iroquois always retained certain elements of sover-

eignty. The Iroquois and other native communities struggled to maintain their traditions throughout American history. Changes in fortune in recent years have created new opportunities and new challenges for Native Americans as they continue to play an important role in the history of New York State.

### Newspaper Tie-ins to Today:

Look through the newspaper and at maps of New York for names of geographical places (towns, rivers, lakes etc.) with Native American names. Do these ancient names still make sense today? Do a little research and try to determine which tribe named each location.

The Iroquois Confederacy or Six Nations decided upon rules by attempting to reach a consensus or mutual agreement. Look for articles about different groups in conflict. Have students represent each group in the conflict and have them try to find a solution and have all parties involved reach a consensus. Was it possible? What did each side give up to reach an agreement? What was gained?

Photo: Reproduction Hiawatha wampum belt made by Ken Maracle, Cayuga from Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, courtesy of the Iroquois Museum, Howes Caves, NY. For more on Henry Hudson, Hudson River and the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadracentennial go to [www.explore400.com](http://www.explore400.com).