

HURONS

The Huron Indians were part of the Iroquoian people who were named Hurons by the French in the 17th century. Hurons, meaning "boar's head," came from the Old French *hure*, which referred to the male Hurons' bristly coiffure. The name also meant "rough" and "boorish." Although the French gave them this name, the Hurons called themselves *Wendat*, *Guyandot*, or *Wyandot*. These names are assumed to mean "islanders" or "peninsula dwellers." This is because their territory was bounded on three sides by water. The Huron name is usually referred to those who were of importance to the Canadians. The Wyandot name specifically refers to those Hurons who moved to the southeastern area of Detroit in the United States. As a matter of fact, the city of Wyandot, Michigan has a picture of the Wyandot/Huron Indians at the entrance of the city. Living between Lake Simcoe and the southeastern corner of Georgian Bay, 20,000 to 40,000 of these Indians lived in 18 to 25 villages. Settling between Lake Huron and Lake Ontario, these Indians were significant to both the Americans and the Canadians.

Just like the Miami Indians, the Huron Indians were divided into numerous clans. They consisted of the Rock Clan, the Cord Clan, the Bear Clan, the Deer Clan, and the One House Lodge. The Huron Indians looked up to the Iroquois and imitated their skills in building. They built their houses with elm bark and elongated them on high grounds near rivers and springs. They also copied the ways in which the Iroquois farmed by using the same crops, such as corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, and tobacco. Corn was a primary crop that was grown by the Hurons, however later the "three sister" crops of Amerindian agriculture, which included corn, beans, and squash, were grown together as a principal food source. Even though the women were in charge of planting and farming, the men would always be responsible for the tobacco plants, and the women would be in charge of all other crops. The Hurons had so many crops, one commented on the seven thousand acres saying "it was easier to get lost in the corn field" than in the surround forest. About eighty percent of the Indians' food came from their crops. The rest went to trade with others. When it came to hunting, the Hurons used bows and arrows to shoot deer, nets to catch beaver, and traps to catch bears. During the times in which they caught bears, they would keep them alive for two years, feeding them and fattening them up so they would produce a lot of meat for the tribe. They also liked to fish in lakes and rivers. Whitefish was the most common fish they caught. Unlike the Iroquois, however, they used canoes that were made of birch bark, like those of the Algonquian tribe. The nets they used to capture beaver were made from plants called nettles. They tied stones at the ends of the nets in order to keep them down once thrown over the animal. Other weapons consisted of harpoons made of bone hooks, and tomahawks made by the Europeans.

Some of the clothing they wore consisted of deerskin shirts, breechcloths, leggings, skirts, and moccasin shoes. During the winter when it was cold, they used fur to trap in the extra heat. The Hurons were very decorative with their clothing. They often used a lot of painted designs and would fringe the edges of their leggings, skirts, and shirts. They also would use strips of fur as additional flare. When they painted their faces, they would use vegetable and mineral dyes mixed with sunflower oil or bear fat in order to produce the colors red, black, violet, and green.

It is also interesting to note the ways in which they cared for their children. The Huron Indians believe that their children were the future of the tribe. Taking full advantage of this notion, the children were educated at a very young age. The boys would go out every once in a while with the men and learn how to hunt and gather food, while the girls would learn how to plant crops, store food, cook, sew, make pottery, and weave baskets and nets. When the children were babies, mothers cared a great deal for their health and made sure that they could chew and swallow their food. In order to make it easier, mothers of the tribe would chew the food first to break it down, and then give it to the infant to digest easier.

One of the most famous things the Hurons were known for is their involvement in the fur trade. Samuel de Champlain, founder of New France, developed a close relationship with the Hurons and they became trading partners. The Hurons would trade their fur with the French for European goods. Since beaver was a highly valued fur, the Hurons would run through their river routes and portages on a regular basis in order to capture enough beaver for the Europeans. The Europeans would use beaver pelts to make hats and coats, shipping them over to Europe to disperse in other countries.

Finally, another interesting aspect of the Huron Indians is the way in which they celebrated death. When a member of their tribe passes away, they hold a feast for relatives and friends. Wrapping up the corpse in furs, they would place it on top of a litter inside of the village and mourn. After several days, they would move the litter to a nearby cemetery where they would build a small cabin over the corpse. Inside of the cabin, the Indians would place food, oils, tools, and presents in order to help the person be on their journey into the spiritual world. Every ten years, the Hurons held a Feast of the Dead. During this feast, people would bring remains of their dead relatives back to the village, scraped the bones clean of any skin and rewrapped them in furs. After this was done, as a tradition they would feast, tell stories about the dead, play sporting games, and give presents to their young.