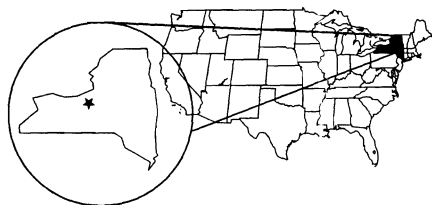


## IROQUOIS CONFEDERACY



Of all Native American flag symbols, none has a longer history of representing its people than does Hiawatha's Belt of the Iroquois Confederacy—over 400 years. Six nations make up the famous Confederacy, located in the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada.

Formed around 1570, the Confederacy, or Iroquois League, originally comprised five tribes, from east to west: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. In the early 1700s a sixth tribe, the Tuscarora, migrated from North Carolina to the border regions between New York and Pennsylvania and united with the original five tribes in 1722.

Known among themselves as the *Hodinoshone*, or “People of the Long House”, the Iroquois League dominated its neighbors, drawing strength from its unity (ENAT, 103-107). From earliest times, this unity was symbolized by a

wampum belt fashioned in a pattern that has become known as “Hiawatha's Belt”. (Wampum are beads made from whelk and clam shells strung on twine made from plant fiber and sinew. Either as individual strands or as fashioned into belts, wampum was valued highly and given as gifts or exchanged ceremonially.) Each tribe in the Confederacy had a unique wampum belt. For example, the Tuscarora belt was white and bore four stripes of the blue-purple shells (*Map of Iroquois Lands*, n.d.).



Hiawatha's Belt depicted five figures (AIDD, plate 18). In the center was what to some is a heart, to others is a great or sacred tree under

which the Iroquois met in council. On either side of the central device were two differently-sized squares or rectangles, connected to one other and to the central device by a narrow band. The belt records the native interpretation of the League's formation.

The five devices symbolize the five original tribes: the Seneca, "keepers of the western door"; the Cayuga, "people of the marsh" and "keepers of the Great Pipe"; the Onondaga, "name bearers" who kept the wampum belt that contained the history of the Iroquois; the Oneida, "stone people" symbolized by the Great Tree; and lastly the Mohawk, "keepers of the eastern door".

In the last thirty years, the unity of the Iroquois nations has grown stronger. Several confrontations between Iroquois and the governments of Quebec and New York have increased Iroquois self-awareness, leading to the re-emergence of "Hiawatha's Belt" as a symbol of the Iroquois. Thus in modern times, what was once a wampum belt has been reborn as a flag. Seen in both Canada and the United States, the blue or purple flag bearing the symbol of the unity of the five nations has become a rallying symbol for Iroquois of all tribes (Karoniaktajeh [Louis Hall], "Ganienkeh", *The Flag Bulletin*, XVI:4, July/Aug. 1977, cover & 108-111). 🍷

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