



THE Huron Indians

When explorer Jacques Cartier journeyed up the St. Lawrence River in 1534 he met some Huron Indians. They were among the first Native Americans to have contact with the French.

The Huron established a close relationship with the French as fur-trading partners. The French gave them the name Huron. The word comes from the traditional Huron hairstyle that reminded the French of a wild **boar** (*hure* in French).

The Huron were made up of four separate tribes: Attingneongnahac (barking dogs), Attigneaouantan (bear), Tahontaenrat (deer), and Ahrendaronnon (rock). The Huron called themselves the Wendat (pronounced Wyandot). This name may mean “islanders” or “peninsula dwellers.” It comes from the **peninsula** between the Georgian Bay and Lake Huron near where the Huron lived when the French arrived in the Great Lakes.

During the summer of

1615, explorer Samuel de Champlain visited the Huron. Champlain estimated that 30,000 Huron lived in eighteen different villages.

Huron villages were composed of large houses that were 25 to 30 feet wide and up to 200 feet long. The sides and domed roofs were covered with slabs of tree bark. Many people lived in each house. High fences encircled the villages and protected them from enemies.

Huron villages had large gardens where corn, beans, sunflowers, squash, and tobacco were raised. The Huron harvested so much corn that they traded extra corn to other Indian tribes. According to one observer, the Huron had so many crops that “it was easier to get lost in the corn field” than in the surrounding forest.

(Continued on page 3)



■ = Huron settlement

Today, we eat corn on the cob at picnics and popcorn at movie theaters.

But did you know that corn has been important to human survival for a long time? Often called maize, corn was developed from a grass, called teosinte, which grew in present-day southern Mexico over seven thousand years ago. Early corn was only about the size of a pinkie finger. Native Americans, usually women, picked the largest and healthiest corn to plant as seed the next year. Over thousands of years, corncobs grew larger and each plant produced more ears of corn.

Corn changed the way some Native Americans lived.



They stayed in one place to grow crops, instead of moving around to hunt animals and gather wild foods. In a good year, extra corn was dried and stored in case of **drought** or disease the following year. Dried corn also fed people through the winter, allowing settlement in colder areas. Cornhusks were woven into mats, baskets, dolls and even shoes.

Many Native American traditions, stories, and

ceremonies involve corn. One of these is the “three sisters” (maize, beans, and squash), sisters who should never be apart. Beans and squash were planted around each corn stalk. The bean vines could climb up the cornstalk. The squash provided shade and kept insects away.

Corn made up more than half of Huron Indians’ meals. The women picked corn, dried it, and then ground it into flour for cornbread and other dishes, such as candy corn with maple syrup used as a sweetener.

Early British colonists depended on the corn that Native Americans gave them to survive the winter. The Native Americans also taught the colonists how to grow corn. Spanish explorers brought corn back to Europe and it was soon spread around the world. Today, corn is the world’s third most planted crop, although much of it is used for animal feed.

CORN SOUP

2 cups roasted corn
deer or beef soup bone with meat
16 oz. can of red beans
3-4 potatoes

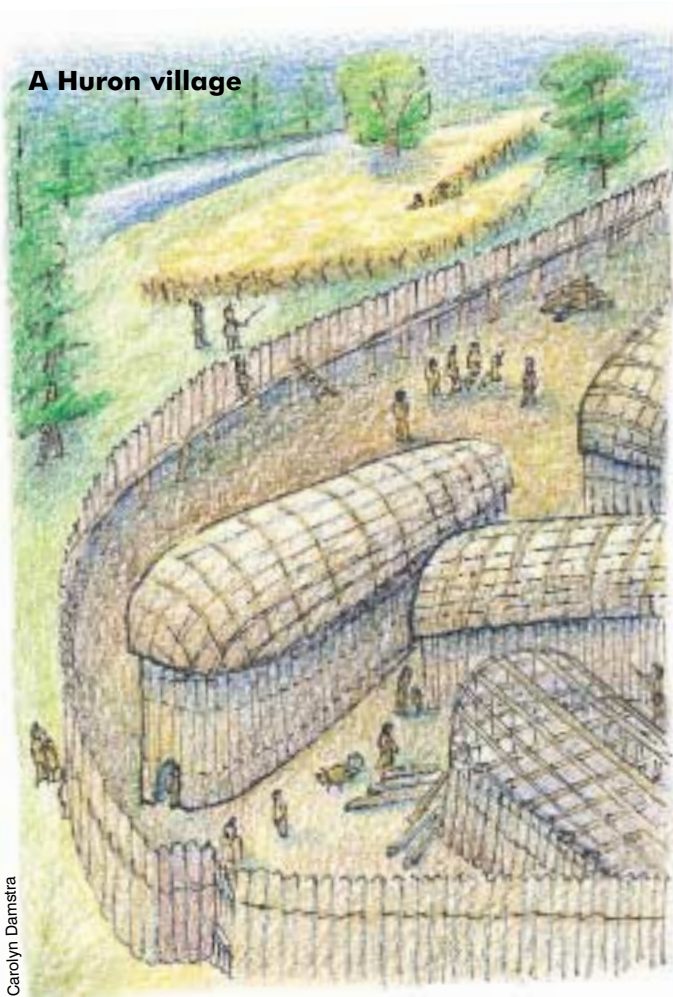


This is a traditional dish of many Native American tribes. First, roast the corn over a grill or in the oven until it is golden brown. Remove the kernels. Next, rinse the corn and soak it overnight in a 6- to 8-quart kettle, 3/4 full of water. In the morning, add the soup bone and bring the liquid to a boil. Simmer for about six hours. One or two hours before serving, add drained, precooked red beans and cut-up potatoes.



A Huron village

Carolyn Darnstra



(Continued from page 1)

Huron men often were taller than Frenchmen. Most Huron warriors shaved their heads, except for a **scalp lock**. The men did the fighting, hunting, fishing, trading, and canoe building. The women did all the household duties, raised crops (except for tobacco), gathered firewood, tanned hides for clothing, and made pottery.

The Huron wore deerskin shirts, **breechcloths**, leggings, skirts, and moccasins. They often painted designs on

their clothes and fringed the edges of their leggings, skirts, and shirts.

When the Huron painted their faces they used vegetable and mineral dyes mixed with sunflower oil or bear fat to produce colors of red, black, purple, and green.

Life for the Huron changed dramatically after the Europeans came to North America. The French brought trade

goods (guns, cloth and metal items) and Christianity.

They also brought disease. The Huron suffered from **epidemics**, especially smallpox, whooping cough, measles, and influenza. Within twenty years after the French arrived, more than 50 percent of all Huron people had died from disease.

The Huron suffered even more when the Iroquois Indians, a long-standing **rival**, attacked them in the late 1640s. In two years of fighting, the Iroquois forced the Huron to leave their

homelands. The remaining few hundred Huron escaped west to present-day Wisconsin. Eventually, they moved to the Straits of Mackinac. When the French founded Detroit in 1701, the Huron resettled there.

The Huron, or Wyandot, lived around Detroit until the 1840s when they were moved to Kansas by the U.S. government. After the Civil War some of the Kansas Wyandot moved to Oklahoma. Today, there are approximately 4,000 Wyandot Indians divided between the Wyandot Nation of Kansas and the Wyandot Nation of Oklahoma.

Where to Take Your Family

The **Huron Museum and Huron/Ouendat Village** in Ontario, Canada, shows what Huron life was like between 1500 and 1600, before Europeans arrived. Visitors to the living history museum can explore the two longhouses, climb a lookout tower, grind corn, play Native American games, and see the pottery and baskets they used. The museum is located at 549 Little Lake Park Road, Midland, Ontario. Telephone (800) 263-7745 or visit www.huroniamuseum.com.

What Did You Learn?

BONUS:

What Indian tribe forced the Huron Indians to move west?

- a. Cherokee
- b. Wyandot
- c. Iroquois

1. *What caused many Huron Indians to die after the French arrived?*

- a. drowning
- b. disease
- c. horse accidents

2. *Where did corn first grow?*

- a. southern Mexico
- b. Ontario
- c. England

3. *Where did many Huron Indians live in 1715?*

- a. Detroit
- b. Mackinac Island
- c. New York

Vocabulary WORDS



Boar: a wild pig

Breechcloth: a cloth worn over the groin area

Drought: a long period without enough rain

Epidemic: the fast spread of a disease

Peninsula: a piece of land with water on three sides

Rival: someone who competes with someone else

Scalp lock: a long lock of hair left on the top of a shaved head

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