Oneida

Definition: Oneida from Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary

(1666) 1: a member of an American Indian people orig. of New York
2: the Iroquoian language of the Oneida people

Summary Article: Oneida

From The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide

Member of an American Indian people who lived in central New York State and belonged to the Iroquois confederacy. They speak an Iroquoian language. Traditionally the Oneida were maize-farmers and hunters. During the American Revolution they aided the colonists and their villages were burned in reprisals. Although promised security of their homelands, most of their New York territory was lost in illegal land purchases after the war. After 1822, the Oneida separated, some staying in New York, others moving to Thames River, Ontario and Green Bay, Wisconsin. They now number 12,500 in the USA and 1,500 in Canada (2000).

The Oneida originally had a seasonal settlement pattern, living in semi-permanent villages and moving between their fishing, farming, and hunting grounds. They mainly lived in longhouses covered with bark which housed a number of families. Oneida society was matrilineal (tracing descent through the female line) and was divided into three clans: Wolf, Bear, and Turtle, each with a chief, and each having three representatives in the Iroquois confederation. The Wolf was associated with passage through life, the Bear with medicine, and the Turtle with the environment. Women controlled farming and the election of chiefs; men were responsible for hunting and warfare, although they had to get the women's approval to go to war.

The Oneida once controlled millions of acres of land in the eastern USA. They traded furs with the Dutch and then the British in the 17th century, but colonization soon began to diminish their territory. Their main village, a stockaded town of 60–100 dwellings, was destroyed by the French in 1696. After 1713 they were joined by a group of Tuscarora. They sided with the British against the French during the French and Indian War, but during the American Revolution they supported the colonists. Their involvement drew reprisals from the British and their Indian allies, and they were attacked by the Mohawk, under Chief Joseph Brant. After the war they were joined by the Mohegan, and were compensated for their losses by the US government, who promised that they could keep their homelands. However, in 1785 and 1788 the Oneida lost a total of 2.1 million ha/5.3 million acres of land in New York State in illegal land deals. In 1821 the Oneida paid US$25,000 for a 2 million ha/5 million acre reservation in Wisconsin, but this was reduced by treaty to 1.6 million ha/3.9 million in 1822. The first to relocate were a Christian group in 1822, and they were joined by other bands in subsequent years. Another group of Oneida bought a reservation in Ontario, Canada, in 1832.

The Oneida's reservation in Wisconsin dwindled in size during the 19th and 20th centuries, and they now own only 1,840 ha/4,600 acres, with 1,096 ha/2,740 acres held in trust. Of the 12,000 Oneida in
Wisconsin, only 2,500 live on the reservation. The Oneida Nation of New York State numbers some 500, and obtains much of its income from a casino operation.
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