

Topic Page: [Seneca](#)

Definition: **Seneca** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Most populous division of the Iroquois Confederacy; a tribe of Native North Americans who inhabited N New York. In 1848, the Seneca Nation was formed by the peoples of the Allegany and Cattaraugus reservations. Other Seneca live in Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Ontario. Today, c.7000 Seneca live on reservations in W New York.

Summary Article: **Seneca**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Member of an American Indian people who originally lived in western New York State and eastern Ohio. They belong to the Iroquoian linguistic group, and were the largest nation in the Iroquois League. Their political system was based on matrilineal kinship (passing through the female line). Aggressive warriors, they absorbed numerous peoples as their territory expanded to supply the European fur-trade in the 17th century. Although much of their culture has been lost, the Handsome Lake religion, a blend of Seneca and Christian practice, has a strong following. The Seneca now live in New York State, Ohio, and Oklahoma and number about 8,000 (1990).

Traditionally the Seneca cultivated maize (corn), squash, and beans, supplemented by hunting in the winter and fishing in the spring. Matrilineal families lived together in longhouses covered in bark and up to 90 m/300 ft long; they usually housed 50–60 people. On marriage a husband would move into his wife's longhouse. The lineages were grouped into eight clans, and the clans into two moieties (major divisions). Each moiety had its own chief who was guided by a council of adult males. After the foundation of the Seneca Nation in 1848, a republican form of government was established, consisting of a council of 18, an elected president, and three judges.

The Seneca believed that everyone had an Orenda, or inner spirit, that contributed to the Orenda of the family or clan, so adoption was a common practice to maintain the health of a group. Their major deities were the Earth Holder, or 'great creator', and the Sun, a warrior god. The most important healing ceremony was the Midwinter Ceremony, performed by the False Face Society who wore sacred wooden masks.

The Iroquois League, initially a confederation of five Iroquois nations, was formed in the 16th century, and became the most powerful American Indian military alliance in northeast America. The Seneca could field as many warriors as the rest of the Iroquois League put together and warfare with other American Indian nations was frequent. In the 17th century, in an effort to control the fur trade, they expanded their original territory to encompass almost all of western New York state. Whole towns of other tribes were absorbed in the process.

During the American Revolution the Seneca allied themselves with the British. When the British were defeated the American general John Sullivan destroyed their villages in 1779 and their society became disorganized. In 1797, they ceded their remaining land for a small sum and small tracts of land as reservations, four of which (Tonawanda, Cattaraugus, Oil Springs, and Allegheny) still exist. The Seneca remained disorganized until 1848, when all the various groups, except those at Tonawanda, formed the Seneca Nation. Hereditary chiefs were abolished under a new republican system of government,

revitalizing Seneca political life.

In about 1800 Handsome Lake, a Seneca warrior, initiated a religious revival that incorporated old religious traditions with Christianity. Known as the Handsome Lake religion, it was centred in the longhouse and spread quickly throughout the Iroquois league. It remains a major influence on Iroquois culture.

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

Seneca. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/seneca>



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.

APA

Seneca. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/seneca>

Chicago

"Seneca." In *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon. Helicon, 2018. <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/seneca>

Harvard

Seneca. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. [Online]. Abington: Helicon. Available from: <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/seneca> [Accessed 22 September 2019].

MLA

"Seneca." *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon, 2018. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/seneca>. Accessed 22 Sep. 2019.