

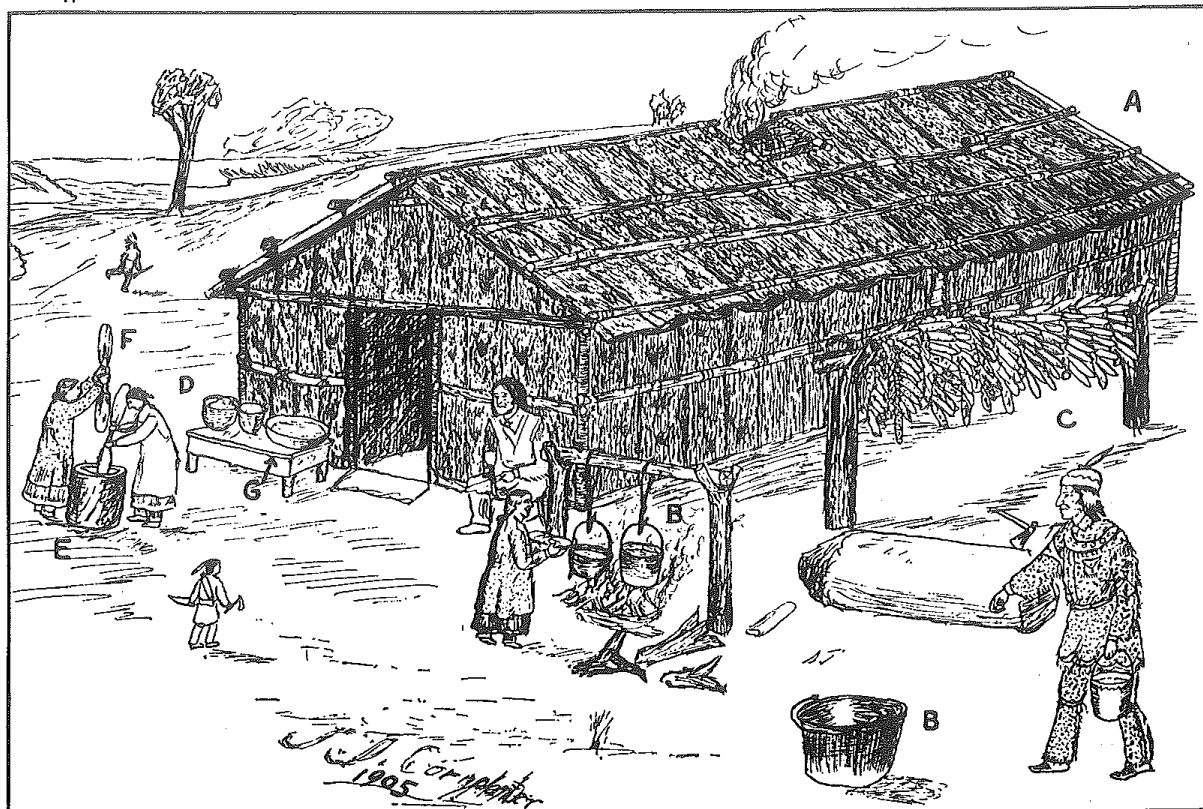
DENVER ART MUSEUM

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Department of Indian Art

FREDERIC H. DOUGLAS

Curator



IROQUOIS DOMESTIC SCENE
DRAWN BY JESSE CORNPLANTER, A SENECA, IN 1905
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IROQUOIS FOODS

IROQUOIS. This name is given to the tribes which made up the League of the Five Nations: Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga and Seneca. Once they all lived in New York State, but for many years about two-thirds have lived in Ontario, Canada. Most of the Oneida live in Wisconsin. The population is about 16,000. The American group is about 55 per cent full Indian blood. For details of their history and dwellings see Leaflet 12.

MEALS. Until the abandonment of the communal Long House (A), about 1800, the general custom was to serve but one meal a day, about the middle of the morning. When all were assembled the women dipped portions for the men into wood or bark bowls, and served themselves when the men were through. But the pot was simmering all day, so that anyone could eat at any time. As white influence became stronger this custom began to die. Now each family has its own cabin and eats three meals a day. Hospitality to friends and strangers alike was very strongly stressed.

COOKING used to be done in clay pots—later of brass or iron (B)—over an open fire, in the ashes, or by grilling in the flames. But ordinary cook stoves have long been used.

CORN is and always has been the principal food. Several dozen varieties of four kinds of maize are used. All are subdivisions of the species *Zea mays*. They are starchy or bread corns, flint or hominy corns, sweet corn and popcorn. Other varieties are sometimes found.

PREPARATION. Most of the crop is gathered when ripe, husked and stored by hanging bunches, made by braiding the husks, from the rafters or drying poles (C). To remove the hulls the grains are boiled with ashes and then shaken in a special hulling basket (D) of splints. Meal is ground by the mortar and pestle method. The mortars (E) are sections of logs with a cavity in one end. The pestles (F) are maple poles about 4 feet long and 3 or 4 inches across. A section in the center is carved down to a size convenient for grasping. The meal used to be sifted in flat basket sieves (G), now replaced by those of metal wire.

RECIPES. Corn bread is made by boiling flat round cakes of dough or by baking them in the ashes or on flat stones. These two types of bread have many varieties, due to ways of cooking and to the addition of beans, berries, meat, etc. The boiled bread was usually sliced and eaten with oil, fat or sugar. Butter is now used. For the hunter or traveler the shelled grains were parched and ground into meal with maple sugar. This meal, which was eaten raw or with a little water, had wonderful nutritive value and staying power. In the early days it was universally used and praised by white and Indian alike. Hominy or sagamite was also very common. It was made by hulling the corn by pounding and winnowing and then boiling the meal with water into a mush or thick soup. Green corn on the cob is boiled and roasted, and after shelling, is made into several kinds of soup and bread. Mixtures of corn and other foods, especially beans in the dish called succotash, are still common and numerous.

BEANS are a very important source of food. Several dozen varieties, mostly of the genus *Phaseolus*, have been collected. The Indians divide them into two groups, those used for soup and those mixed with meal in bread making. There are several recipes for green beans in the pod. Shelled beans are boiled, fried, made into soup and mixed with meat, other vegetables, and very commonly with corn meal.

SQUASH was as important a food as corn and beans. The three were usually planted together and were known as "The Three Sisters." Considerable mythology and ceremony were connected with them. Six or seven varieties of squash and pumpkin were cultivated, as well as cucumbers and water and musk melons. They were boiled, baked and fried. Squashes were sliced and dried for winter use. Cucumbers were pickled in brine. Squashes were mixed with meal in breadmaking and dried pumpkins were ground into meal for cakes. Squash flowers were boiled with meat to make a sauce.

GREENS are made of the following: milkweed, waterleaf, marsh marigold, yellow dock, pigweed, lamb's quarters, mustard, purslane, dandelion, burdock, nettle, skunk cabbage, leek, wild garlic, wood betony, sensitive fern. Watercress, peppermint, oxalis, sheep sorrel, leek, wild garlic and the fresh shoots of grapevine, sumac, raspberry and pine were eaten raw. Maple bark was sometimes pounded into meal for bread. Cornstalks were sucked for sweetness.

ROOTS of the yellow pond-lily, Solomon's seal, Indian turnip and skunk cabbage were used long ago. Roots which are perhaps still used are crinkle or pepper root, groundnut or wild potato, burdock, arrowhead, cattail, artichoke and spring beauty. While the common potato was long known to the Iroquois they do not seem to have used it much until fairly recent times. All these roots were eaten raw or cooked or were pounded into meal.

EDIBLE FUNGI are still eaten extensively by the Iroquois. The common mushroom, the morel, the puffball and several species of the *Polyporus* fungus are the kinds used. They are usually peeled, cut up if large and boiled. Sometimes they are fried after boiling a while. Lichens were only eaten in times of great want. When boiled they formed the "rock tripe" of the early explorers. They have not been used for a long while.

NUTS were important, especially when other crops failed. Quantities were stored against such emergencies. Now they are usually only eaten in the winter as a treat. The nut gathering season, in the fall, was a happy time, as parties of young people made holiday gatherings out of the harvesting trips. Hickory and chestnuts were the most valued. Other kinds used are acorns of several types, bechnuts, black walnuts, butternuts and hazel nuts. The nuts were cracked with special sets of stones and the meats crushed and boiled. The oil was skimmed off and used as a sauce. The meats were mixed with other foods. The Seneca powdered nuts and dried bear or deer meat for baby food. Sunflower seeds were boiled for their oil.

BERRIES have always been favorite foods. They were eaten as gathered, crushed and used as sauces or mixed with other foods, or dried for winter use. Strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, currants, blueberries, cranberries, june berries, mulberries, squawberries, elderberries, and wintergreen were the most common varieties.

FRUIT. Apples, cherries, plums, grapes, pawpaws, and mandrakes were all eaten very extensively. After the coming of the whites peaches, pears and quinces were added to the list. Apples were preferred. They were eaten raw, boiled and baked. For winter use they were stored in bark barrels or sliced and dried.

MEAT. Nearly all animals and birds except the carnivores were killed for food. Meat seems to have been rather scarce. The meat of deer, bear and the larger animals was fried after boiling, or broiled. The oil was highly valued as medicine. Much meat was dried. Beaver, skunk, woodchuck, muskrat, rabbit and squirrel were all eaten. Dogs were eaten at ceremonial feasts. In addition to all the common game birds, owls were eaten. Birds eggs were frequently consumed. Frogs legs and turtle meat were used for food. Pork, beef, etc., are now used quite generally.

FISH were important and much eaten. All varieties were cooked in many ways when caught, or dried for later use. Crayfish, clams and other mollusks have always been favorite foods. Several kinds of insects were once eaten. Ants, locust grubs, waterflies and wasps are mentioned by the historians.

MAPLE SUGAR has always been an important article of diet. In the early days it was mixed into almost every kind of dish as a substitute for salt. The sap of the maple, and also of the birch, was much used as a beverage and mixed with food. Honey came into use after the arrival of the whites.

SALT was used but little, if at all, by the tribes when discovered, even though New York State has large stocks of salt. Reasons for this non-use are largely guesswork. In later years the use of salt as seasoning gradually increased. Now it is used by all.

BEVERAGES. Water was the most common drink. As much of the Iroquois food was liquid or semi-liquid, such as soups or thin stews, not much water was drunk with meals. Many drinks were made from berry juice. Corn and nuts of several kinds were roasted and boiled to make drinks. Birch and maple sap were favored drinks. Infusions of many plants were made up. Hemlock leaves, birch twigs, sassafras, wintergreen, yarrow, witch-hazel, raspberry twigs, sumac seeds and horse-mint were all used this way. Very rarely maple sap was fermented as an intoxicant. Wine-making or the brewing of corn liquor were not known.

Compiled from the following sources by F. H. Douglas :

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