

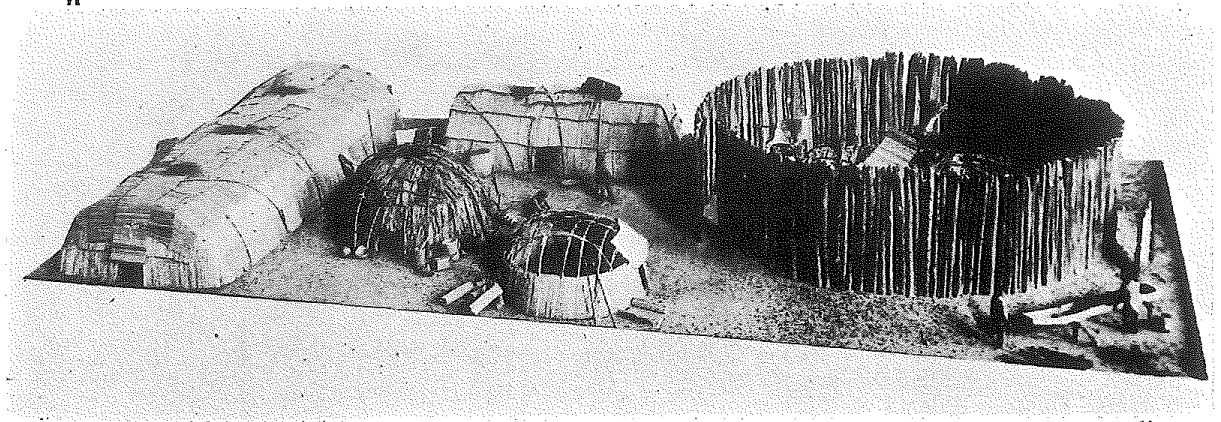
DENVER ART MUSEUM

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FROM A MODEL IN THE PEABODY MUSEUM

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NEW ENGLAND INDIAN HOUSES, FORTS AND VILLAGES

Colonial Period

ALGONKIN. All of the New England Indians were members of this linguistic stock. For information about tribal names and locations, history and population see double leaflet 27-28.

VILLAGES. The aboriginal people living in New England disappeared so long before scientific investigation began that accurate information as to their tribal organization is largely lacking. To the early writers each group living in one place or following one local leader seemed to be a separate tribe, whether it had a really independent political existence or not.

Each of these "tribes" held an area of land suitable for hunting, fishing and agriculture which was marked by well known and recognized boundaries. If the band was small and its land had woods, streams and fields close together, there was one more or less permanent village, to some extent fortified. But if the hunting, fishing and farming lands in a tribe's possession were widely scattered the people were forced to move about seasonally. The winters were spent in wooded hunting territory, the early springs by the fishing streams or along the shore, and the summers in the fields. The villages were moved about to meet these needs. While the villages usually moved in one unit, individual families often made side trips in search of food.

FORTS. The 25,000 Indians living in the area in primitive times were much inclined to fight each other, and all the bands were in constant danger of attacks from the Iroquois and later from the whites. Hence forts were necessary and common. It was the general practice for each rather sedentary band to fortify its village and for the wanderers to have one or two such forts in their territory to which they fled in time of danger. Log palisades 10 to 12 feet high, with supplementary earthworks, were the means of defense. The logs were set very close together, the crevices between serving for loop-holes. The entrance was through a narrow passage formed by the overlapping of the ends of the circle. The picture shows this clearly. Small forts, 40 to 50 feet across, surrounded one or two wigwams. The large refuges sometimes covered several acres of ground and enclosed as many as 75 houses. The forts were round, square or rectangular.

HOUSE TYPES. From about the Maine boundary southwards, round or rectangular mat or bark covered wigwams were used. In Maine a conical, bark covered wigwam was more common, though the other types were also used. Geographical position rather than tribal practise seems to have been the determining factor in deciding which type was to be used. The birch-bark and conifer poles needed for the conical form were more common in the north, while to the south flexible saplings and reeds for matting were more easily to be found.

FRAMEWORK

DOMED-WIGWAM OR ROUND HOUSE. This house was made by setting a row of slender, flexible poles 2 to 3 feet apart around a rough circle 10 to 16 feet in diameter. Opposite poles were bent over and lashed together with bark fibre cord in a series of arches 6 to 8 feet high. One or more rows of horizontal poles were fastened in place around the walls, thus making a strong, light domed framework. The poles were cut and the frame made by men. One family lived in a house of this kind.

Such dwellings were, and still are, used by many other tribes of the Algonkin stock. See leaflets 25 and 36.

LONG HOUSE. The essential details of the construction of this house are the same as for the round house, the difference lying in their size and shape. There was a great variation in the size of these buildings,

lengths ranging from 30 to 200 feet being given by the historians. It is probable that about 20 by 40 was the average. The long sides had pairs of poles arched over and connected by horizontal members. The ends were either perpendicular or arched in to a slight extent. There were several doors and smoke-holes, according to the size of the building. The small and medium houses were communal dwellings for several families, while the large ones were used for ceremonial purposes.

CONICAL WIGWAMS had the simplest framework of all. The butts of a number of long, stout poles were set in the ground around a circle and the tops locked together, thus forming a conical framework. Information as to the exact details of the placing of the poles, interlocking of the tops, etc., is lacking, but it is probably safe to suppose that in these points this wigwam resembled the tipi of the Plains Indians. But unlike the tipi the wigwams seem to have been rather permanent structures grouped together in villages surrounded by palisades.

WIGWAM COVERINGS were made from large sections of bark, or from matting made of flag leaves sewed together with bark cord. Women did this work. In the spring big pieces of birch, chestnut or oak bark were removed from the trees and pressed flat under heavy timbers. Possibly elm, pine and hemlock bark were also used. Often sections of thin birch bark were sewed together in long strips. The long edges of pieces 3 or 4 feet in length were sewed together with split spruce root. The ends of the finished product were reinforced with thin strips of wood. These long sections were light, waterproof and durable and could be rolled up for easy transportation. Mats 3 to 4 feet wide and 8 to 10 feet long were made by sewing flag leaves together with Indian hemp or bark fibre cord. Like the birch rolls they had end reinforcing and strings attached to tie them to the framework. The wigwams of poor people were sometimes covered with a thatch of reeds, grass, corn-husk or leafy boughs.

There seems to have been no rule as to which of these types of covering went with each sort of wigwam. The birch-bark rolls probably were more or less confined to the conical wigwam area in Maine, but the bark or flag mat covers were evidently used about equally elsewhere. Early writers say that the bark covered lodge was warmer and tighter than one finished with matting.

The mats or pieces of bark were tied to the frames in overlapping layers, the bottom row being put on first and the others above it like shingles. Flexible poles were often fastened on outside the cover to keep it in place. In putting on the covers openings were left for doors and smoke holes. The smaller types had two doors, usually on the north and south sides. Two doors were provided so that the entrance could always be out of the wind, the one toward the wind being closed with a piece of bark. The small houses had one smoke hole in the center of the roof. In windy weather a screen, controlled by a pole reaching from the ground, was put up to keep the smoke from blowing back into the room. The large communal and ceremonial houses had several doors and smoke holes. The doors were about three feet high.

INTERIOR ARRANGEMENTS. In the round and conical houses, unless they were unusually large, there was a central fire, often surrounded with stones. In the large houses there were several fires. In all but temporary or poor homes there were platforms built against the wall, a foot or so high and of varying width, on which the people sat and slept. The walls of the more permanent dwellings were lined with fine rush matting trimmed with embroidered or painted designs.

Mats and animal skins were piled thick on the beds. Skins closed the entrances.

FIRE was usually made by striking a spark in tinder, though the friction method was also used. Fallen branches and trees provided the fuel, though trees were cut down occasionally. The butt was laid in the fire-place and pushed along as it was consumed. Cooking utensils were hung over the fire. Frames for drying and smoking food were often built over the fires. If additional light was needed small torches were made from splinters of pitch pine.

HOUSEHOLD UTENSILS. Before the coming of the whites cooking was done in round bottomed baked clay and soapstone pots of several sizes. But metal kettles very generally supplanted these after they became available. Trays, bowls and ladles of graceful form and uniform thickness were made by alternately charring and scraping knots of maple and other hardwood trees. Smaller ladles and spoons were made in the same way from mountain laurel, called "spoon wood." Birch bark was made into boxes, buckets and dishes. These were made watertight by sealing the seams with spruce-gum. The dark inner side of the bark was on the outside of these vessels, and was decorated by scraping so that the light under bark showed in floral patterns. Colored porcupine quills were often wrapped around the rims. Large wicker and splint baskets were used for carrying various materials in quantity, and bags made in a twined weave from many vegetable fibres served for carrying and storing smaller objects. In prehistoric times only stone tools were used.

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

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