

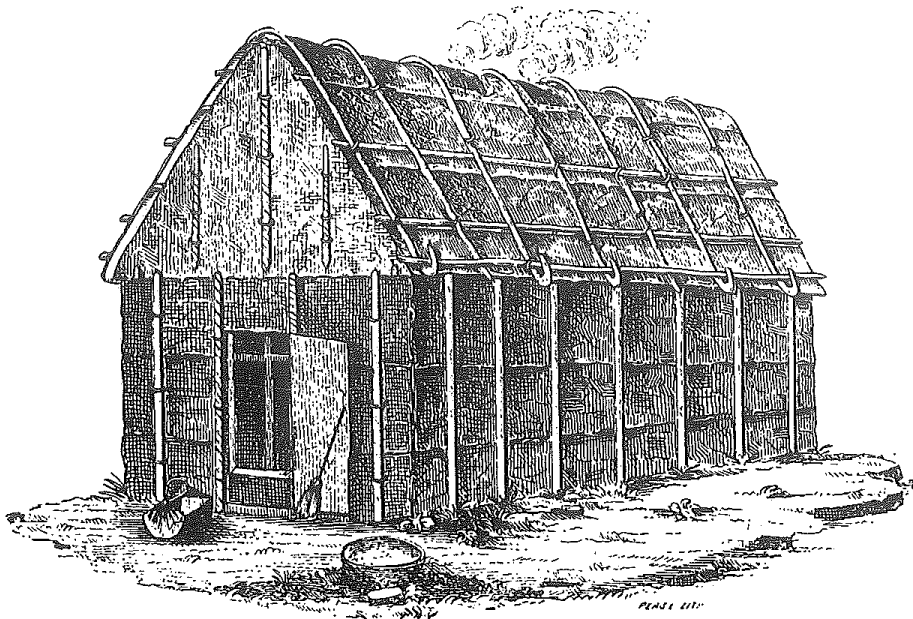
# DENVER ART MUSEUM

DENVER, COLORADO

## *Department of Indian Art*

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**An Iroquois Bark House, identical with the Long House  
except as to its length.**

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## THE IROQUOIS LONG HOUSE

**THE IROQUOIS: LOCATION AND HISTORY.** The name Iroquois is generally applied to the five, later six, tribes of the Iroquoian linguistic stock who were found by the whites living in what is now northern and western New York state and in nearby territory. The Five Nations were Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas. In 1715 the Tuscaroras came up from North Carolina and were admitted to the League. About 1570, though possibly earlier, these tribes formed the political organization known in history as the League of the Iroquois. About 1600 they came in contact with the Dutch on the Hudson and obtained firearms from them. Thus armed, as were none or but few of the neighboring Indians, they began a career of conquest by war and diplomacy which by 1700 had made them masters of all the Indian tribes in New York, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, northwest Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, northern Tennessee, the western portions of Illinois, Indiana and Michigan, southeastern New England and much of eastern Canada. After 1700 the power of the League began to decline. In the wars between France and England they always supported the latter power. When the American Revolution broke out the League was unable to decide what policy to follow, and so, in 1777, its member tribes decided to support the Americans or English according to the wish of each tribe. All but the Oneida and about half of the Tuscarora joined the English. For all practical purposes this was the end of the League, though ever since some of its ceremonies and organization have been kept up.

At the end of the revolution the tribes which had followed the English were settled in Ontario. The Oneidas gradually yielded to the western push of the white settlers and for some years drifted into Wisconsin. In 1838 they were assigned a reservation near Green Bay. The remaining tribes were settled on reservations in western New York.

**POPULATION.** At the time of their greatest power the Five Nations numbered between twenty-five and thirty thousand. At present the population is about 16,000, located on 7 reservations in New York, 7 in Ontario and Quebec and on one in Wisconsin. There are a good many others scattered about the United States. This population is increasing on the whole, though some of the bands are diminishing.

**THE LONG HOUSE.** The Iroquois were an agricultural people living in permanent villages of community houses, surrounded by corn fields and often protected from attack by log palisades. These community buildings were called Long Houses. The Iroquois name was "hodenosote." From this word came the name "Hodensaunee" by which the League was known to the world and to its members. The Long House went out of existence at the end of the 18th century.

**DIMENSIONS.** The Long Houses ranged in length from fifty to one hundred and fifty feet. In width they were from fifteen to twenty-five feet and in height—to the ridge-pole—fifteen to twenty feet. The average house was about 60 by 18 by 18. Often the houses were made for a single family and were then only about 20 feet long. This small form was called "ganosote," bark house.

**CONSTRUCTION; FRAMEWORK.** Logs with forked tops were set in the ground in a rectangle the size of the building to be constructed. The logs were 4 to 5 feet apart and the tops of the logs were about 10 feet above ground. These upright poles were tied together by cross beams, running both around the rectangle and across it.

**ROOF BEAMS.** The roof was not formed with a ridge-pole and rafters, such as we use today, but by bending a number of slender flexible poles in a series of rather pointed arches. The curve of the poles had to be quite steep in order to enable them to bear the weight of the heavy snow. A roof frame made this way looked the same as one made by a white carpenter except for the absence of the ridge-pole.

**SIDING AND ROOFING.** The framework thus put together was covered with rows of sections of bark, overlapping like shingles. To obtain these large bark shingles elm or ash trees were killed by girdling when the sap was rising. The sections of bark stripped off in this manner were cut into lengths of about 6 feet, being several feet wide. The rough outer surface of the bark having been removed, the shingles were stacked up in piles to dry, care being taken that they should not warp.

The shingles were tied to the walls and roof of the building in overlapping rows. On the sides the grain of the bark ran parallel to the ground and on the roof it was laid at right angles. The bark was tied to the poles of the framework with splints or bark rope. After it was tied in place a series of poles was set up outside the bark shingling, corresponding with the poles of the framework, and was tied to the first set of poles, thus binding the bark more firmly in place. Similarly poles were curved over the roof atop the bark directly over the inside rafters. The ends of these poles were curved up at the line of the eaves. Several rows of poles were in turn laid at right angles to the first set and firmly tied in place.

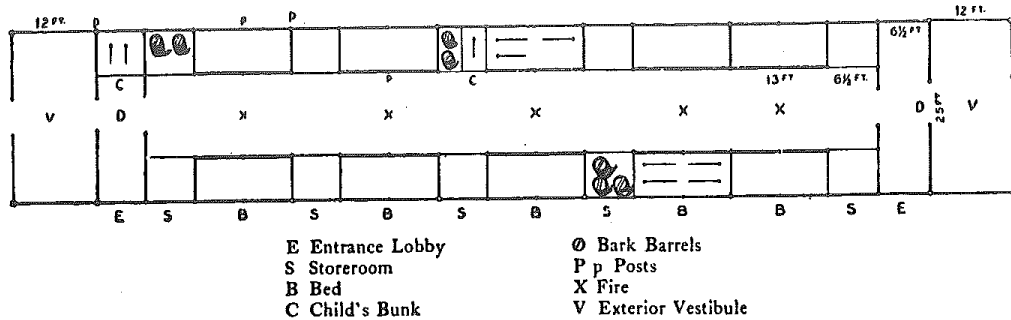
**OPENINGS.** The Long House had no windows. At each end there was a door, made of bark boards hung on wooden hinges or of animal skins hung over the opening. In the roof, along the ridge, was cut a series of square openings, designed to admit light and to permit the escape of smoke, which ascended to these openings from the fires below without the aid of any chimney. The smoke holes could be partially or entirely closed against wind and rain by pieces of bark on top of the roof. They were controlled from within by pushing with a long pole.

**INTERIOR ARRANGEMENTS.** At each end of the building was a vestibule 10 to 15 feet long and running across the building. These rooms were used for storage and as meeting places for the inhabitants of the house. In summer the bark sides were removed, thus making the vestibules into porches. Next to the vestibules were small rooms for storage. The remaining space was divided into a series of booths built along both sides of the room. A central alleyway ran the whole length of this space. The partitions forming the booths extended about 6 feet out into the room. The booths were of two sizes. One, about 6 feet wide, was used for storage and was equipped

with cupboards and shelves. The other, about 13 feet wide, was used as the living quarters of one family. If the family was large two adjoining booths were assigned to it. In each booth there was a platform of bark boards, about a foot high and filling up the entire floor space of the booth. Fastened against the wall was another platform, about five feet above the lower one and not quite so wide. These two platforms served for the living and sleeping accommodations of one ordinary family, or for part of a large one. Sometimes small bunks for children were built in the storage booths. The platforms were covered with reed mats and animal skins. The cooking utensils, clothes, hunting equipment and other possessions of the family were stowed away in the booths wherever there was room for them. Food was kept in barrels of bark in the adjoining storage booths and on platforms built on the rafters. Corn was hung in large masses from the rafters. These masses were made by braiding the husks of the ears together.

**FIRES.** The fires were made in rough stone fireplaces along the central alleyway. There was a fire for each pair of booths. Wood for the fires was piled in the storage booths and in the end vestibules. While the smoke was supposed to escape through the holes in the roof, a great deal of it remained in the building, so that the long room was always unpleasantly smoky. The Indians avoided the smoke by sitting or reclining on the bark platforms as much as possible. The fires kept the houses comfortably warm in all but exceptionally cold weather, when the combination of the cold and the smoke from the extra large fires must have made the Long Houses rather uncomfortable living quarters.

FIVE-FIRE LONG HOUSE, AFTER LAFITAU'S DESCRIPTION



The single interior line shows the upper shelf running the whole length of the house proper. The second line shows the lower shelf used as a bed. The unit of measurement is the length required for a sleeping man, 6 feet or a trifle more.

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

League of the Iroquois. L. H. Morgan. 1922 Edition edited by Herbert M. Lloyd.

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