

The Onondaga Nation Today

Like other member-nations of the Haudenosaunee, the Onondaga Nation survives today as a sovereign, independent nation, living on a portion of its ancestral territory and maintaining its own distinct laws, language, customs, and culture. Today, the Onondaga Nation consists of a 7,300-acre territory just south of Syracuse, on which it maintains its sovereignty and operates outside the general jurisdiction of New York State. The Nation is still governed by a Council of Chiefs, selected in accordance with its time-honored democratic system. In the same vein, many Onondagas practice traditional ceremonies and adhere to religious philosophies and social customs that long predate



Tadodaho, Onondaga spiritual leader

contact with Western civilizations. Aspects of this ideology have been incorporated into America's legal system, as well as into its culture. Personal and societal consideration of the Seventh Generation is but one example of a Haudenosaunee world view that has informed, enhanced and enlightened American and other national cultures.

As in any other vibrant and dynamic society, Onondaga culture continues to change and evolve to meet the challenges of the modern world. Just as most Americans today no longer live in log cabins or sod houses, neither do Onondaga people live in their traditional elm longhouses. Most Onondagas today live in frame or modular homes. They work as teachers, retail clerks, or for the Nation itself, at the Onondaga Nation's healing center, school, fire department, and hockey and lacrosse arena. Other Onondagas work outside the Nation, as teachers, lawyers, nurses, construction workers, or in other professional occupations.

As an independent, sovereign government, the Onondaga Nation government does not pay income, sales, or excise taxes to New York State or to the federal government, nor does it receive any of the benefits paid for by these taxes. Unlike several other New York native nations, the Onondaga Nation has chosen not to become involved in the casino business or other gambling ventures. Instead, the Nation operates a tax-free smoke shop, which funds many community projects, including the repair of homes, a reservation water system, a healing center, and the recently-completed Onondaga Nation multi-purpose arena. Opened in 2002, the 1,900-seat ultra-modern facility boasts over 40,000 square feet, and doubles as a facility for both hockey and lacrosse, not only for Onondaga citizens, but for neighboring town, city, high school and college teams as well.

Onondaga Nation Facts

- The present-day territory of the Onondaga Nation (“People of the Hills”) is approximately 7,300 acres just south of Syracuse near Nedrow, New York.
- Between 1788 and 1822, the Onondaga Nation lost possession of approximately 95% of its land through a series of illegal takings by the State of New York in violation of Federal law.
- Onondaga (the keepers of the Central Fire) is considered to be the capital of the Haudenosaunee, a name meaning “People of the Longhouse”. The Haudenosaunee are sometimes referred to as the Iroquois Confederacy, or Six Nations.
- The Haudenosaunee was founded at Onondaga after the Peace Maker visited the warring nations. This is estimated to have occurred around the year 1000 A.D. The five original nations of the Haudenosaunee were the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas. The Tuscaroras joined the confederacy in the early 1700’s.
- The nations of the Haudenosaunee came together after agreeing to work together peacefully rather than continuing to battle each other. They established a democratic system of government led by a Grand Council consisting of chiefs from each nation. These chiefs worked with clan mothers to ensure the preservation and well-being of the Haudenosaunee.
- The Haudenosaunee is considered to be one of the oldest participatory democracies on earth, and provided an important structural model for the Founding Fathers developing the United States Constitution.
- The Haudenosaunee became the greatest Indian power in colonial America, with a homeland that spanned northern New York between the Hudson and Niagara rivers and an influence that extended from the Ottawa River to the Chesapeake Bay, and from New England to Illinois.
- The Onondaga Nation maintains traditional cultural views and a traditional system of government. The Nation does not permit the sale of alcohol and has opposed casinos and online gaming.
- The Haudenosaunee are known internationally as a peaceful people, with a heritage of statesmanship, government/law and an oral tradition passed from generation to generation.
- Onondaga remains the meeting place for the Grand Council of Chiefs, the traditional ruling body for the Haudenosaunee. The Longhouse serves as a place of spiritual, cultural and social activities, the seat of government and symbol of security.