

INTRODUCTION

Truly a misleading picture of American history has been drawn! According to most United States history books, it would seem that women have very little place in history as compared with men — a thousand George Washingtons appear for every Betsy Ross. When women do appear, they are usually found ministering in wifely servitude or presented as laughable “characters,” Carrie Nation-style. The reality is that women have consistently shouldered as much if not more than their share of the burden of life, be they businesswomen, schoolteachers, or factory workers; farmers’ wives, faculty wives, or housewives.

Happily, this book is a case in point; the history of women in Tompkins County alone proved to be a subject rich beyond measure. In the following pages you will get a tip-of-the-iceberg glimpse into the realm of women’s untold tales, and an inkling of the history we have been denied.



About the Book

All of the quoted material, unless specifically noted otherwise, is taken from local sources.

Footnotes can be located at the back of this book, beginning on page 135. They not only serve to explain the source of some piece of information, but on occasion offer commentary or additional information.

Spelling and grammatical errors in quotes have been retained when they enhance the flavor and meaning of the quote.

Persons are encouraged to reproduce any portion of this book that may prove useful.

Feedback of any kind is welcome. Contact Elaine Lindy at 272-8639 or 119 Auburn St./Ithaca, NY 14850.



The history of women in Tompkins County originated long before the first white settler made her way into the virgin wilderness. In fact, women of Native American cultures were known to inhabit this area over five thousand years ago. Here the story begins.

Earliest Inhabitants

IROQUOIS

Who were the first inhabitants of New York State? One archaeologist asserts that the earliest settlers came through the Bering Strait in Alaska, and continued south. Another claims with equal vehemence that they came north from the southeast.¹ Clearly, the specifics are undetermined. But in any case, it seems certain that early hunters had established themselves in our state before the Great Pyramids were reared at Giza in 2600 B.C.²

These prehistoric cultures can be divided into two major periods, Archaic and Woodland.³ The Archaic period, dating from approximately 3500 to 1000 B.C., was typified by nomadic hunters, fishers, and gatherers of wild foods with no knowledge of agriculture or pottery. During the Woodland period, dating from approximately 1000 B.C. to A.D. 1400, tribes developed more complex cultural patterns involving pottery, pipes, and an emphasis upon a farming rather than a hunting economy. These cultures changed and developed, and one group to emerge was "The Iroquois."

A Little Background

One theory of the word "Iroquois" is that it originated with the Algonkians, a neighboring tribe. They were not overly fond of the Iroquois, and the word means "real adder" or snake, in the Algonkian language. The Iroquois did not go by this name themselves; their word was "Ongwanonhsioni," which means "longhouse builders." Sure enough, the longhouse, unique to the Iroquois, was their basic living structure. This was a rectangular lodge, built of poles and small tree trunks and covered with bark. These houses were from 12 to 18 feet high, about 16 feet wide, and from 50 to 200 feet long. Within the longhouse, individual nuclear families occupied different sections along each side of the structure, which were divided for privacy. By the doorways were buckets of water to extinguish potential fires. The longhouse was a firetrap of the first degree, and this fact was often used against the Iroquois in warfare.

The Iroquois diet consisted of corn, beans, and squash, and probably every possible combination thereof. Nuts, berries, fish, and game also showed up in the tribal pot, which was always on the fire for snacks. The Iroquois were a semi-transient people. They would pick up and move when the soil in the area became exhausted, and wild food and game became scarce — about every ten years.

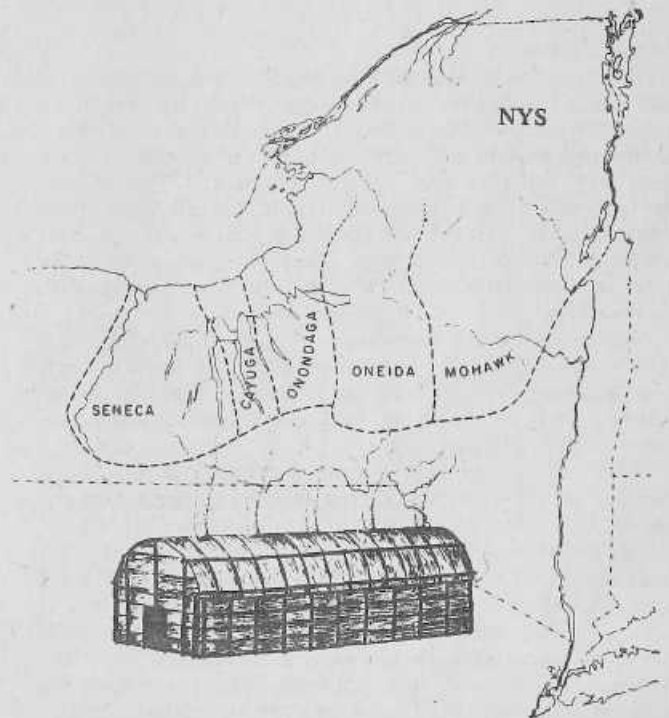
Formation of the League

There were five major Iroquois tribes in New York State: the Onondagas, Mohawks, Senecas, Cayugas, and Oneidas. Predictably, the one that included Tompkins County was the "Cayugas." By 1609, the total population of all five tribes may not have exceeded 5,500 (approximately the population of Groton today).⁴ These tribes were

sometimes on friendly terms with each other, and sometimes not. Their constant quarreling worried a certain peace-loving Iroquois, Deganawida. He wanted to organize all the tribes into a single unit. So he rowed all over in his canoe, trying to convince folks to unite and be peaceable. He didn't have much luck.

Seeking help in his cause, he ventured up north to the Neutral Nation, or Attiwendaronk. This nation occupied both sides of the Niagara River and the north side of Lake Erie. They were known far and wide as a tribe that would not wage war. This is the story: Their ruler was believed to be a direct descendent of the first woman born on earth, the original Mother of Nations. She was the Peace Queen, and the nation in which she lived would never shed a brother's blood. At the time of Deganawida, Jikonsaseh was the Peace Queen of the Neutral Nation. She was well-respected, and it was to her that he wanted to speak. Jikonsaseh supported the idea of a single, co-operating nation, and so she joined Deganawida and another tribesman with similiar ideals — Hiawatha — and they traveled to many different villages. People finally started to listen. Interest

LANDS OF THE IROQUOIS NATION





An Iroquois village.

grew into action, and culminated in the formation of "The League of Five Nations."⁵ The League was formed in the 1500s and remained powerful until the late 1700s.⁶

The League consisted of fifty *sachems* which were male representatives from each tribe. This was an important office, and was usually held for life. All the sachems would meet in a Grand Council when it was necessary to settle disputes between the tribes, or determine foreign policy. Decisions were reached *consensually*, that is, until everyone agreed. The impression of unity that the League conveyed was an effective deterrent to potential enemies.

Woman's Place

Though the League of Five Nations was comprised of only male sachems, women were equally powerful in Iroquois society. In fact, they were so valuable that when an Iroquois woman was captured by a warring tribe, it took twice the usual ransom to get her back.⁷ The women planted, raised, and were responsible for all agricultural production. It was believed that the soil would not bear unless cultivated by women. They actually owned the fruits of their labor, and "shared" the food supply with the men.⁸

Women were the foundation of tribal organization. All rights to use land and property were handed down through them, making their culture "matrilineal." When a couple married, they would move into her mother's longhouse, making it "matrilocal," also.

Iroquois women held a central position in the social structure of the tribe as well. The matrilineal family was the basic unit of Iroquois society; it was comprised of a head matron (often, but not necessarily, the eldest woman), her daughters, their descendants through the female line, and her unmarried sons. The matron was highly prestigious and respected. She meted out discipline, adopted captives, nominated successors to sachems, and presided over the economic, ceremonial, and political tasks for which the family was responsible. Several of these matrilineal families

comprised a *clan*, each numbering from 30 to 200 persons. The clan, under leadership of its matrons, adopted captives, bestowed ordinary names on its members, and arranged certain feasts and ceremonies. If a murder was committed, the clan protected members against repercussions by paying a sum to the clan of the deceased. Several clans comprised a *moiety* or "half," and two of these halves comprised a tribe. The halves functioned as social and ceremonial rather than political units.



Women and men were equal political partners in the League of Five Nations. Matrons were responsible for the selection of new sachems, and the nominee had to be from the same matrilineal family as his predecessor. Frequently a younger brother of the former sachem, or a sister's son would be selected. (The son of a sachem belonged to his mother's matrilineal line, and so he did not belong to the same matrilineal family as his father. Therefore, a son could not follow his father's footsteps, a frequent practice in our society.) When a candidate was approved by all the other women of the clan, the matrons of the other clans in that moiety, the sachem of that and the opposite moiety, and also by the League itself, then he was "in." But throughout his career, the matron was always watching over him. She and only she had the power to reprimand him, warn him, and even initiate impeachment proceedings if she decided he was unfit.

In short, both Iroquois men and women had certain functions and duties that brought them status and respect – a truly egalitarian society.

The League Prospers

The League of Five Nations worked effectively. One way they used their organization was to eliminate all the fur trade competition around them, thus strengthening their hold on the business. Campaigns were successfully waged between 1649-75 against the Huron, Tionontati, Neutral, Erie, and Adaste Nations.

When the Iroquois were battling the Hurons from Ontario, the former became angry at the Neutral Nation.



Apparently, the Neutral Nation and the Hurons were friendly, and they offered homeless Hurons refuge in their land – without, of course, offering military assistance to either Huron or Iroquois. But the Iroquois were infuriated. In the autumn of 1650, they attacked one of the Neutral Nation's frontier towns, garrisoned by 1,600 warriors. The town was defeated and the prisoners led away to captivity. The next spring, another town was attacked, and soon all Neutral towns were deserted. Jikonsaseh, the Mother of Nations, who helped Deganawida organize the League in the first place, was taken captive and transferred to a prison camp on the Ganarquo (Mud Creek in East Bloomfield, Ontario County), where she grew old and died. Thus, the long-standing Neutral Nation was destroyed.



Taps

But the days of the Iroquois predominance were numbered. Colonists believed that the Iroquois were pro-England during the Revolutionary War, and gave supplies to the redcoats. They had to be punished. In 1779, George Washington instructed General John Sullivan to "cut off their settlements, destroy their crops, and inflict on them every other injury time and circumstances permit."⁹ He enthusiastically complied. The "Sullivan Expedition" drove thousands of Iroquois out of their land, and methodically devastated their homes, crops, and fruit trees. Coreorgonel, a small Cayuga village near Buttermilk Falls, was burnt in this expedition, and its residents were driven north.

Post-Sullivan Years

Said a local historian:

Sullivan's raid had reduced the Indian population to a fraction of what it had been earlier, yet almost daily the settlers were approached by one or two. Those who returned were desolate as they wandered from the site of one lost village to another. Reduced to homeless, begging wanderers, they were a little frightening, but for the most part more troublesome than dangerous, and became at times quite a nuisance.¹⁰

The Iroquois People ultimately survived this ordeal, and though limited in land and forced to modify some of their cultural heritage, they continue to live under their traditional government today.



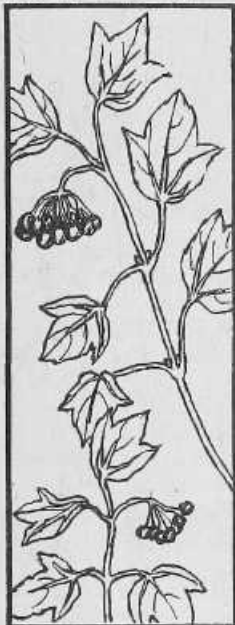
Iroquois women were not without the pains of menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. But the development of the science of herbal medicine over hundreds of years enabled them to pinpoint certain plants that functioned as effective pain relievers. The next few pages provide a quick run-down on some of the local plants that these and other Native American women used for relief from the whole range of "female complaints."¹¹

We know that the body needs certain minerals to sustain its basic functions. Many plants can supply these same minerals. Brewing a tea of the plant makes the minerals available in a drinkable, often pleasant form.

LOCAL ABORIGINAL

MENSTRUAL CRAMPS

Highbush Cranberry



Viburnum opulus; infrequent*. Tall shrubs 6-10 ft., with clusters of white-snowball-like flowers.

Found in wet, gravelly terrain, often in swampy areas.

Gather in spring, when rising sap makes bark easy to peel.

To Prepare: Cut off stems; make cut all around stem through bark, every 6 inches; slit each section down one side; remove bark by sliding knife underneath; dry thoroughly in warm room (will curl); store in covered container.

To Brew: Use 1 oz. of finely cut bark to 1 pt. of boiling water, allow to steep for ½ hr., strain. Taken cold, drink one small glassful at a time until cramps disappear.

Active principle – bitter glucoside called viburnin.

Well-known as "Crampbark" – independently discovered by many cultures for relief of menstrual cramps.

Local Sources: Michigan Hollow Swamp, Danby; Ellis Hollow; bog between Slaterville and Dryden Lake; Fir Tree Swamp, Freeville; near Malloryville Bog; Mud Pond.

Black Haw



Viburnum prunifolium; frequent. Shrub or small tree, white flowers and dullish black fruit.

Found in dry, rocky terrain, hill-sides, thickets, and in boggy, acid soils.

Collect in spring when flowering, when the sap rises and bark slips easily from the stem. Prepare bark as in Highbush Cranberry.

Take 1 T of liquid 3 times a day, before meals.

Local Sources: South Hill Marsh; Malloryville Bog; McClean Bogs.

(menstrual cramps, cont.)

Elecampane



Inula helenium; frequent. Coarse-looking plant up to 6 ft., daisy-like flowers.

Found in damp, rocky meadows and pastures, often in the shade.

Gather roots in autumn from 2-yr.-old plants.

Dry in the shade. *To Brew:* Use 1 oz. herb to 1 pt. boiling water.

Take in wineglassful doses (it will taste bitter).

Active principles: inulin, invert starch, volatile oil, crystallized substances.

Legend says Helen of Troy was holding Elecampane when carried off by Paris.

Local Sources: Upper Buttermilk Glen; upper reservoir, Six Mile Creek; Cascadilla Creek; Cayuga Heights; McClean.

Motherwort



Leonurus cardiaca; common. 5-6 ft., fuzzy white and pink flowers, perennial.

Found by roadsides and waste places, in rich, loamy and gravelly soil.

Gather above-ground parts when flowering – August.

To Brew: Use 1 oz. herb to 1 ot. boiling water.

Take in wineglassful doses every 2-3 hrs.

Also, hot fomentations made cramps in painful menstruation.

Local Sources: Grows profusely throughout the county.

*Frequency refers to the degree of abundance in a region and is indicated by this sequence: rare, scarce, infrequent, frequent, common, very common.

The properties of a plant may have different effects on the body, depending on the dosage administered. In addition to the specific applications listed below then, many of these plants are used for a host of related ailments.

FERTILE HERBS

INDUCE MENSTRUATION

American Pennyroyal



Hedeoma pulegiodes; common. 6-12 inches, square stems and opposite leaves, tiny bluish flowers. Found in dry, sterile, acid soil. Gather above-ground parts when in full bloom - June or July.

Dry in cool room.

To Brew: Use 1 oz. herb to 1 c. boiling water.

Drink 2 cups before going to bed (has a pleasant, aromatic taste).

Very popular with Iroquois women, used for a variety of female ailments.

An effective insect repellent, just rub leaves on skin.

Local Sources: Grows profusely on any dry ground.

SUPPRESS MENSTRUATION

Yarrow



Achillea millefolium; very common. 6-20 inches, resembles Queen Anne's Lace, white or pink flowerheads. Found in pastures, meadows, roadsides.

Gather entire plant in late summer when in full bloom.

To Brew: Use 1 oz. herb to 1 pt. boiling water (it will taste bitter).

Achilles is said to have used yarrow for wounds and cuts on the battlefield.

Also called "Nosebleed" by Europeans who stuck its leaves in their noses to stop the flow of blood. May be used to make beer - allegedly quite intoxicating.

Local Sources: Northwest of Enfield Falls; between Etna and Ringwood; Bald Hill, Danby; Forest Home; grows abundantly.

PREGNANCY & CHILDBIRTH

Trillium



Trillium erectum; frequent. 2 ft., purple flowers, perennial. Found in damp, rich, well-shaded woods.

Gather roots in late summer or fall. *To Brew:* Boil 1 part root to 20 parts water.

Drink as needed to ease the pains of childbirth.

Popularly known as "Birthroot."

On protected species list! Send for seeds of get permission to remove plant.

Local Sources: Found in most ravines of the Cayuga Lake basin; Ellis Hollow; McClean-Dryden region; a lot along Six Mile Creek; Mud Creek in Freeville.

Blue Cohosh



Caulophyllum thalictroides; frequent. 1-3 ft., small green flowers, round blue seeds.

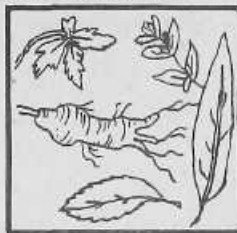
Found in rich soil, in ravines and woods. Gather root in fall.

To Brew: Steep root without boiling. Drink tea regularly for several weeks prior to expected date of delivery to relieve discomfort.

Known as "Squawmint," "Pappoose Root."

Local Sources: Caroline hills; Six Mile Creek, Danby; Fall Creek, McClean.

Miscellaneous teas



Space does not permit more than a brief mention of the many plants that have been used by women in particular as pain-relievers. In the realm of pregnancy and childbirth alone, the list includes elder, many of the mints including catnip and peppermint, and various varieties of raspberry and blueberry.

Local Sources: Many of these pain-easing plants can be found in their natural habitat.

...SPECIFICALLY

GATHERING

Herbs

1. Gather at their peak, usually in spring and early summer months.
2. Best time for collection is early morning after evaporation of dew (dew and rain could cause herb to mold).
3. Best time of month for collection is when the moon is waxing:
 - a. less sap in foliage and stems;
 - b. herbs dry more quickly.

Leaves

1. Leaves should be picked when young (before plant depletes itself in flowering).
2. Yellow, faded, or insect-bitten leaves should not be used.

Roots

Roots are best collected:

1. when the sap rises in early spring;
2. after the plant sheds its leaves in the fall or winter;
3. when the moon is waxing full (roots are most tender).

Barks

1. Gather in early spring or fall.
2. To avoid tree damage, take from large branches only.

PRESERVATION

- use only good quality material
- be sure to dry thoroughly

Leaves & Flowers

1. Hang in bunches, about four large handfuls to a bunch.
2. Suspend in a cool dry shed, beneath a tree, or spread out on a surface and turn frequently.

Roots & Barks

1. Remove all dust and dirt (a brisk scrub with a toothbrush works well).
2. When dry, break into pieces and store in jars or tins.
3. Beware of vermin!

Send for seeds to:

A World Seed Service
J. L. Hudson, Seedsman
P. O. Box 1058
Redwood City, California 94064

There are many fine herbals in
bookstores and libraries.

PREPARATION

Leaves & Flowers — Brews

1. Snip leaves & flowers at the stalk — big leaves should be cut into smaller pieces to release the juices.
2. Place in enamel, steel, or earthenware pan.
3. Add sufficient cold water (usually 1 oz. herb to 1 pt. boiling water).
4. Heat over gentle flame until almost boiling (slightly uncovered).
5. Heat for approx. 3 min., but do not boil.
6. Remove from heat.
7. Steep in covered container for at least 3 hrs. before use — overnight steeping is best.
8. Straining is optional.
9. Brew keeps for approx. 3 days (do not refrigerate).

Roots & Barks

1. Some can be eaten raw, after a fine grating.
2. To soften, brew as above for from 15 min. to 1 hr. (depending on plant) and keep covered throughout.

Note: Herbs lose their potency in sealed containers after one year, so renew supply annually.

CAUTION!

Herbal medicine is not for the novice. Many poisonous plants resemble medicinal ones; even medicinal plants, when gathered, brewed, or administered incorrectly, can be lethal.