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Eastern Woodland Farmers

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The Eastern Woodland Farmers inhabited the shores of the Great Lakes to the St. Lawrence River, and up towards Georgian Bay, in Southwestern and South-Central Ontario.

The Environment

- Deciduous trees like Maples, poplars, birches, elms, oaks and Coniferous trees like pines, the spruces and the firs. Especially important to them were the sugar maples, from which they got syrup; the elm whose bark was used to cover their houses and canoes, or to make pails; basswood from which they made ropes.
- In the meadows, berry bushes, like blueberries or raspberries.
- There were squirrels, bears, rabbits, bear, moose and deer.
- Lakes, rivers and streams; freshwaters full of trout and salmon.
- The Word 'Ontario' comes from the Iroquois word 'Onitario' meaning 'Beautiful Lake'.
- Because their environment was so productive, some 4,000 years ago they decided to stay put and become farmers. In fact they were the only Canadian native people to live primarily by farming.



Ontario lake



Niagara Escarpment



St. Lawrence River

Settlements and Housing

- New villages were settled every 10 to 30 years. Every ten or twenty years – whenever the soil got poor, the place got too dirty, or the fish and game became scarce - everyone would move their village to a new place where the soil was richer in nutrients and the fish and game still plentiful.
- Men looked a few kilometers away, for a place near the water with lots of light that was on a hilltop for better defense and good drainage.
- Site was near a forest that was partly cleared for

crops.

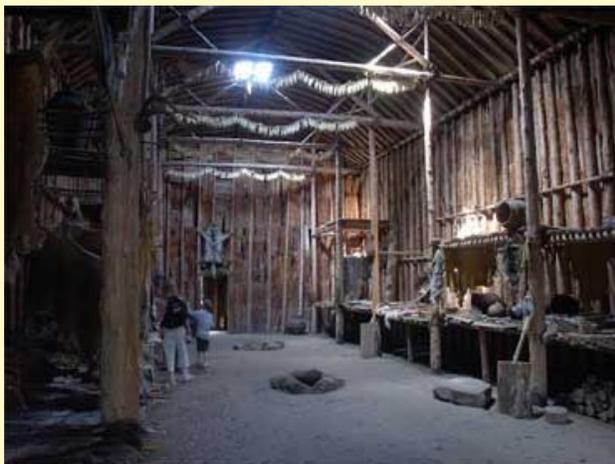
- A couple years before site moves, the field was cleared near the new village.
- A palisade around the village and longhouses were built using wood from smaller trees and saplings, along with some materials from the old village.
- A village could have 20 to 200 longhouses.
- Each family or clan would construct their own longhouse.
- Among the Eastern Woodland farmers, 60 villages were identified, that provided shelter for 60,000 people and 50,000 acres of cultivation.



An Iroquois Village



Longhouse Exterior



Longhouse Interior

Housing - the Longhouse

- They were homes for extended families, grouped by matriarchal lines (relatives of the mother, grandmother, aunt etc.).
- Each female brought her husband and children to live with her in the longhouse.
- The eldest women were the masters of the longhouse.

Structure of the Longhouse

- Wooden poles were bent together; frame looks like a large upside-down basket.
- Saplings were lashed to these to help create an arched roof and exterior wall.
- A variety of trees was used, depending on the tree's strength, flexibility and resistance to decay.
- Exterior bark smoothed for better water run-off.
- Family or clan's symbol usually on exterior of building.

Interior of the Longhouse

- Interior was divided by 20-foot-compartments and two families lived in a compartment.
- Each family lived on fur and mat-covered platforms, five to six feet wide, and 15 feet long.
- In the middle aisle of the longhouses were fires, which families shared for heating, cooking and light.
- There could be 18 families in one longhouse up to 220 feet long.
- Dried food was hung from the rafters.
- Above a family's compartment is a storage shelf where extra animal skin robes, blankets, reed mats, baskets, and clay pots are kept.

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