CLANS

Nations of the Iroquoian family sometimes divided themselves into clans.

Ancestor

The Iroquoians were matrilineal societies, which meant that the families were formed based on the mother, then the grandmother, and so on. A clan thus brought together families who had a common maternal ancestor, even if they did not live on the same territory.

Marriage

Members of the same clan were not allowed to marry each other. When two people got married, the man went and joined the family, clan and longhouse of his new spouse.

Symbol

The clans chose an animal that served as their symbol and gave them their name: clan of the bear, clan of the wolf, etc. Clan members were inspired by the qualities of their clan's animal. The symbol helped clan members from different villages to recognize each other.

A clan

is a group made up of several families who have a common ancestor.

Longhouse

The longhouse, the traditional dwelling of the Iroquoians, housed two to six families from the same clan. The clan grouped together several longhouses, and villages grouped together several clans. A drawing of the clan's animal symbol was prominently displayed at the entrance to the house.