

The Home Forum.

For more information

Books for adults and teens

Indian Givers, Jack Weatherford (Crown Publishers, 1988). A thorough look at the contributions of native Americans to the world.

American Indian Sports Heritage, by Joseph Oxendine (University of Nebraska Press, 1995). A fascinating look at Indian sports and athletes, including Olympian Jim Thorpe.

The Pretend Indians: Images of Native Americans in the Movies, ed. by Gretchen Batouille and Charles Silet. (Iowa State University Press, 1980). Collection of articles – some philosophical, some funny – by various writers.

Debating Democracy: Native American Legacy of Freedom, by Bruce Johansen (Clear Light Publishers, 1998). A scholarly documentation of native American influences on the formation of the United States government.

Books for children

America's Fascinating Indian Heritage (Reader's Digest, 1978). Detailed information on many native American tribes. Beautifully and generously illustrated.

Squanto's Journey: The Story of the First Thanksgiving, by Joseph Bruchac (Harcourt, 2000). Well-researched picture book by a native American. Grades 2 to 5.

Museums

Plymouth Plantation, Plymouth, Mass. (508) 746-1622. A 'living history' museum of the Pilgrims and Wampanoag Indians. Website: www.plymouth.org.

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution. New York, N.Y. (202) 357-2011. www.nmai.si.edu.

Iroquois Indian Museum, Howes Cave, N.Y. (518) 296-8949. www.iroquoismuseum.org.

Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, Calif. (323) 221-2164. www.southwest-museum.org.

Websites

falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/native.htm
A doorway into a wealth of information about native Americans.

www.dickshovel.com/trbindex.html An alphabetical listing of native tribes in the US and Canada.

N.H.C.



NATIVE AMERICANS NOT ONLY PROVIDED NEW KINDS OF FOOD AND RECREATION, THEY MAY HAVE GIVEN THE FOUNDING FATHERS IDEAS ON HOW TO FORM A GOVERNMENT.

Gifts from the Indians



HE'D BEEN kidnapped by an English sea captain and sold as a slave in Spain. Aided by friars, he'd escaped, spent two years in London, and finally made his way back to America. But when he walked into his Indian village of Patuxet in 1619, he found nothing but bones. His tribe had all died of disease.

But that was only the beginning of the story of Tisquantum, or Squanto, as he came to be called. He had learned to speak English during his ordeal. Now he was specially qualified to help the English settlers, who arrived in his homeland in 1620 and established Plymouth Colony. Squanto was an invaluable interpreter. He promoted peace between native peoples and the Pilgrims and taught the settlers the survival skills they needed to survive a second winter. He showed them what foods could be gathered or grown in the new land. The most important of these was corn.

In ancient times, native Americans had

gathered the seeds of a wild grass and planted them. By saving seeds from the best plants and growing them the next year, they encouraged the formation of ears, or cobs, on the plants. Early corncobs were only a few inches long and had eight rows of kernels. Gradually (it took thousands of years), the ears of corn grew larger.

The corn Squanto taught the Pilgrims to grow gave such a plentiful harvest that the Pilgrims were amazed. Corn was far more productive than any cereal crop they knew. Today, corn is by far America's biggest and most valuable crop.

Corn – including popcorn – was eaten in the three days of Pilgrim and Indian feasting that we recall today as the first Thanksgiving. Squash, beans, fish, venison (deer meat), and various "fowls" (probably turkeys, ducks, and geese) were also on the menu. The feast, in fact, may have been the Indians' idea.

The Pilgrims, who had nearly starved their first winter, were thankful for the abundance of food. They were especially grateful for Squanto. William Bradford, governor of the small colony, wrote in his diary that Squanto was "a special instrument sent of God for [our] good."

As more Europeans came to America, they learned of other native foods from the Indians, including maple sugar, cranberries, clams, pecans, and persimmons, among many others.

But food wasn't the only thing native peoples contributed to today's American culture.

Not only food, but fun, too

Lots of things we use for outdoor fun were invented by native Americans. Kayaks were made by Eskimos for hunting seals and walruses. Made of skins stretched over a wooden or bone frame, these long, narrow boats (often 20 feet by 20 inches) were fast.

Canoes – popular all over North America – were expertly crafted of birch bark, animal hides, or other light materials. The Ojibwas of the Great Lakes used to race their canoes. They paddled standing up!

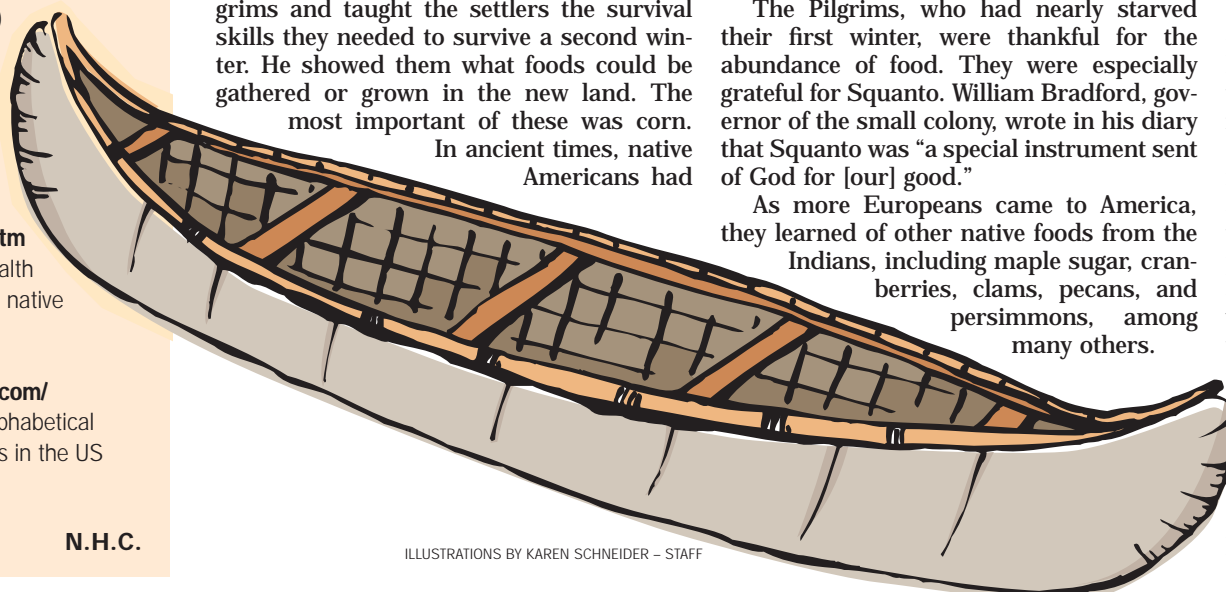
Snowshoes and toboggans were also designed by native Americans. Snowshoes let hunters jog over the deep snow for hours. A toboggan, made of bark that naturally curled up at one end, was a great way to haul their game home.

The Indians enjoyed games – especially one they called "ball play." The sport was hugely popular and played passionately by tribes all across North America. It was the forerunner of our game of lacrosse.

Teams that could include hundreds of men competed on a field that might be half a mile long. Some versions let players use two sticks, and several balls might be in play at once. It was a game of great skill, but also very rough. George Catlin, an artist who spent eight years living among Western tribes in the 1830s, observed "hundreds ... running together and leaping, actually over each other's heads, and darting between their adversary's legs, tripping and throwing and foiling each other in every possible manner."

Some scholars see another, much more profound Indian legacy in America's form of

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAREN SCHNEIDER – STAFF

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government. Bruce Johansen, Donald Grinde, and other experts say the Founding Fathers borrowed ideas about government from the Iroquois Confederacy. The confederacy was a strong union of Indian nations whose influence stretched from New England to the Mississippi River.

An Iroquois lesson in government

Mike Tarbell, a Mohawk, is the educator at the Iroquois Indian Museum in upstate New York. He loves to tell this story: "Benjamin Franklin sat in council with the Iroquois," he says. "He took eight interpreters with him and copied everything down." Franklin's job was to publish Iroquois speeches – speeches that often included ideas about a united government. Later, Franklin served as an ambassador to the Iroquois.

The Iroquois League was made up of five nations: the Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Oneida, and Cayuga. Each nation had a council made up of leaders (sachems) elected by the clan mothers of that nation. The councils governed their own territories separately. But to discuss and decide upon issues that affected all, they met at the Grand Council (also called the Council of the Good Minds). The overriding principle of their government was the Great Law of Peace, which in its simplest form states that it's better to live in peace than in war.

Grand Councils opened with a thanksgiving address. This prayer, which might take hours to recite, helped the Iroquois achieve "one-mindedness." Today, some 17 Iroquois communities in New York and Canada still gather at Grand Council meetings in Onondaga, N.Y. They do not vote until everyone is in agreement.

In 1754, Franklin met with Colonial and Iroquois leaders to discuss how the colonies might govern themselves. It was called the Albany Congress. Hendrick, a Mohawk chief, showed them how the Iro-

quois Confederacy worked. "To illustrate the power of unity," Mr. Tarbell says, "Hendrick used the example the Iroquois used when their nations came together: He held up one arrow and broke it, then held up five arrows bound together and showed how they could not be broken."

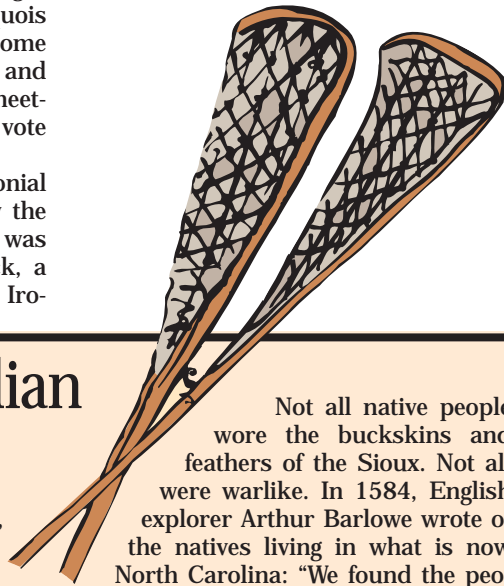
The next day, Tarbell notes, Franklin presented a plan for a new American government designed to weld the individual Colonies into a unified whole. It was called the Albany Plan of Union, and it included many features of Iroquois law.

An Indian symbol on the dollar bill?

The Founding Fathers didn't adopt as much of the Iroquois model as Franklin had advocated. Some scholars dismiss the idea that Iroquois government had any influence on the shape of the United States government today. But then why were Iroquois leaders invited to hear debates about the Declaration of Independence? Tarbell asks. The native delegation slept in Philadelphia's Independence Hall, in a room just above the one in which the debates took place.

Tarbell points to one more piece of evidence: The Great Seal of the United States, which includes the Iroquois symbol of strength in unity. You can find the Great Seal on the back of a \$1 bill. Can you spot the symbol? (Hint: What is the eagle holding in its left talon?)

Nancy Humphrey Case



Who is the Indian that you see?

WHEN you imagine an Indian, what does he look like? Maybe he's wearing buckskins and feathers. And war paint, right? Is he frowning? That image is part of a stereotype popularized by movies, books, and television. They portray Indians as Plains Indians, and all Plains Indians as savage enemies of white settlers.

The word "stereotype" originally referred to a metal plate used in printing. The plate was cast from a mold so that each plate was just like the others. When we stereotype a group of people, we fail to see how different they are from one another. When the Pilgrims landed in North America in 1620, there were perhaps 500 Indian "nations," each with its own customs, values, and language.

Not all native people wore the buckskins and feathers of the Sioux. Not all were warlike. In 1584, English explorer Arthur Barlowe wrote of the natives living in what is now North Carolina: "We found the people most gentle, loving, and faithful." Nor did Indians frown all the time. In the 1830s, American artist George Catlin wrote of the Mandans of North Dakota, "They are fond of fun and good cheer, and can laugh easily and heartily at a slight joke."

"If I were to change anything to bring a truer image of Native Americans," says Mike Tarbell, a Mohawk and the educator at the Iroquois Indian Museum in Howes Cave, N.Y., "it would be this: to replace the frown you always see with a smile. Native people smiled, laughed, and sang a lot."

N.H.C.