

# Iroquois Beaded Pillow

## ORIGINS

*Date:* Post-Contact

*Place:* Upstate New York

*Materials:* Velvet, Linen, Beads, Trim (unknown), Stuffing (unknown)

*Donated*

*By:* Unknown



Caption

## DESCRIPTION

A rectangular-shaped pillow is typical of styles created within the Iroquois Confederacy, it is a true reflection of the Iroquois culture. This pillow has a smaller panel at the top, which is colored purple. The entire pillow is covered in bead work, where on the top panel the beads are placed to resemble a flower. The beads come down towards the lower layer of the pillow and are draped over, and tucked underneath.



Pillow, bottom view

Pillow, side view

Pillow, standard view

## CULTURE

**Description:** The Iroquois Confederacy consisted of six nations of Native American Indians (Onondaga, Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Seneca, and Tuscarora). These six nations had all become a confederacy around 1722, and is centered in Central New York, though there are groups spread out through Lower Canada and the US Great Lakes. Traditionally, the Iroquois culture women had taken the role of caregivers or farmers, while men were hunters or warriors. Today, the Iroquois Confederacy enjoys music, religion and the sport lacrosse. Iroquois craftspeople are well known for their long tradition of exceptional beadwork, and other crafts, which they continue to sell on their National territories or at crafts fairs and other public events.



*Caption:* A standard lacrosse stick (right) vs. an Iroquois lacrosse stick (right)

**Use within Culture:** Pillows within the Iroquois culture were usually made for comfort or decorative purposes. Beadwork within the Iroquois culture was present to some families, and symbolized story telling. Other beaded objects sometimes included clothing, moccasins (usually deerskin), and jewelry.

The most important traditional use for beadwork in the Confederacy was the creation of Wampum Belts – long rectangular works made of purple and white beads created through seashells. These belts are used as mnemonic devices, aiding in a storyteller's memory and many are considered to be amongst the Confederacy's most sacred objects. This pillow is not made of wampum beads, but its use of purple and white colors evokes this style – especially as these colors have been adopted by the Confederacy as their national colors.

**Report written by:** Michael Johnson