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| A close up of a logo  Description automatically generated |
| October 2023 |
| A group of women standing together  Description automatically generated |
| Haudenosaunee women gather for a photograph (PBS) |

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| **How Indigenous Women Championed Suffrage** |
| We hope you had a rewarding Indigenous People's Day this October 9, taking the opportunity to appreciate how native life has and still impacts us today! Although many point to the Seneca Falls Convention and its female abolitionists as the birth of the women's rights movement here in New York State, there is a long history of women's equality that predates any European presence in North America. The Haudenosaunee ("People of the Longhouse") are a democratic coalition of Six Nations: Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and later, Tuscarora, who put an end to a period of war and ushered in an era of peace and prosperity for its people. It became the longest running recorded democracy in history, a matriarchal system of governance with bloodlines traced through the mother, not the father (children inherit their mother's clan name). When a couple was married, the man would leave his tribe/family to live with his new wife and her family, sharing childrearing duties with the whole community. In the case of divorce, which was openly available to women, children stayed with the mother's clan and the ex-husband was sent back to his parents. Under Haudenosaunee government, male chiefs were chosen by Clan Mothers, respected women who listened to the voice of their community and served as representatives to the Chiefs of the Six Nations. Notably, Clan Mothers refused to appoint warriors, instead choosing men who had never killed in battle. As much as they had power to appoint a Chief, if Clan Mothers' deemed his leadership to be irresponsible, they also had the power to remove him from office. While European-American women in the 1800's were told to hold their tongue, obey their patriarch, and surrender their income and property, Indigenous women were expected to voice their opinions, lead a household, and manage resources. It is a model that early suffragists found absolutely inspiring.Haudenosaunee women freely taught their lifestyle to suffragists like Matilda Joslyn Gage, an early and outspoken proponent of Indigenous life as the premier model for the suffrage movement. Gage fostered a relationship with local tribes throughout her life and took what she learned back to her own community. Although most suffragists dismissed Gage as a radical, shrewd strategists like Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott deeply admired the harmony and independence of female life in Haudenosaunee tribes, mirroring that system in their own goals for the women's right movement. In democracy and equality, the United States owes so much to the teachings of First Nations People.*Special thanks to the staff at Ganondagan State Historic Site in Victor, NY, for their incredibly informative tour and resources on this topic.* |
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