



# UPSTATE NY HAD THE LARGEST SENECA VILLAGE IN AMERICA

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Over 350 years ago, the site that now is Victor became home to the largest and only Seneca town in the 17th century United States.

What happened there?

### How they came together

The Haudenosaunee, meaning “people of the longhouse,” was originally known as the Iroquois Confederation by the French. Founded by the Peacemaker with Aionwatha (Hiawatha) and Jigohsahseh (the mother of nations), they united five nations under the Great Law of Peace. Despite initial resistance from Onondaga leader Tadodaho, the Peacemaker helped him embrace peace, forming a political alliance among eventually six nations: Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Tuscarora. The Seneca, Mohawk and Oneida were the most prominent tribes in the region.

### Where are they now?

In 1987, the Ganondagan State Historic Site in Victor was  
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founded as a National Historic Landmark built on the original site of the 17th-century Seneca town. The site is nearly 600 acres and is the only New York State Historic Site dedicated to Native Americans.

### Advocating for Native American rights through politics and art

Founding site manager Peter Jemison is a multi-media artist, of the Heron Clan from the Cattaraugus Territory, Seneca Nation. “When we chose the name Ganondagan, we chose it because its translation into English from Seneca would be, ‘A hill surrounded by the substance of white.’ And that was white blossoms.”

The color white, symbolizing peace, purity, and truth, reflects the Confederacy’s mission and its link to Jigohsahseh, the Mother of Nations. During the site’s 1985 dedication, Tom Porter planted a white pine using tobacco.

Over 37 years, the Ganondagan site has expanded to include a Seneca Bark Longhouse, the Seneca Art & Cultural Center, an auditorium, and a theater, showcasing Haudenosaunee contributions to art, culture, society, and the U.S. governing system. Although retired as site manager, Jemison continues advocating for Native American rights through politics and art.

Visit [ganondagan.org](http://ganondagan.org) to learn more about the site.

Henry Higley looks on in amazement at a diorama of Seneca Village Life in a display during Haudenosaunee Days in this file photo. In 1987, the Ganondagan State Historic Site in Victor was founded as a National Historic Landmark built on the original site of the 17th-century Seneca town.

SHAWN DOWD/DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE ARCHIVES