

Erie

History and Etymology for *Erie*

Noun

American French *Erie*, *Erié*, modification of Huron *Eriehronon* the Erie people

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Erie>

ERIE INDIANS

The **ERIE INDIANS**, or the **CAT NATION**, were first noted in 1624 when the Huron told Fr. Gabriel Sagard about Eriehronon, or Eriuehronon, living across the lake. Sagard's 1639 Huron Dictionary translated this term as "Cat People," possibly referring to raccoons rather than any feline animal. Another mention was made in the French Jesuit Relation from 1647-48, describing the lake above Niagara Falls: "this lake, called Herie [*sic*], was formerly inhabited on its southern shores by certain tribes whom we call the nation of the Cat; and they have been compelled to retire further inland to escape their enemies who are further to the west. These people of the Cat Nation have a number of stationary villages, for they till the soil and speak the same language as our Hurons."

Although Iroquois hostility prevented the French from visiting this area themselves, the Relation of 1653/54 stated: "They [the Iroquois] tell us . . . that the Eries have taken arms against them (we call the Eries the Cat Nation, because there is in their country a prodigious number of wildcats, two or three times as large as our tame cats, but having a beautiful and precious fur). They tell us that an Iroquois town has already been set on fire and destroyed at the first attack . . . they [Iroquois] are inflamed and are arming to repulse the enemy, and are, therefore, obliged to seek peace with us. This Cat Nation is very populous. Some Wyandot, . . . have scattered everywhere since the destruction of their country (1649/50). . . . It is said that they have 2,000 men."

In 1654 the Iroquois lashed out to the west, somewhere toward the south shore of Lake Erie. The Jesuit Relation of 1656 gives a vivid account of this short war, during which the Seneca inflicted severe losses on the Erie. Along with a few subsequent references to Erie refugees or captives among the Iroquois, that constitutes all of the existing documentation.

All contemporary 17th-century maps locate the Erie along the southern lakeshore to the east of a crescent-shaped lake draining into Lake Erie and lying west of a second, fingered lake heading what appears to be the Allegheny River. Most modern authorities equate this first lake with Lake Chataqua (NY). However, review of early 18th-century maps suggest that what is depicted is Lake Chataqua accurately heading the Allegheny and, farther west, the Waterford (PA) swamps flowing north, which was the traditional portage to French Creek, a major tributary of the Allegheny. Certainly the late prehistoric archeological materials found between Erie, PA, and Dunkirk, NY, represent an Iroquoian culture, probably attributable to the Erie, and quite distinct from the latest prehistoric occupation of the Cleveland area.

<https://case.edu/ech/articles/e/erie-indians>

The traditional homelands of Iroquoian-speaking peoples included the Lower Great Lakes and much of the St. Lawrence Valley.

- Haudenosaunee (Five Nations Iroquois)
- Huron-Wendat
- Khionontateronon (Petun)
- Ahouenrochrhonon (Wenro)
- Attiuoindaron (Neutral)
- Eriechronon (Erie)
- St. Lawrence Iroquoian



Haudenosaunee

- Gwe-u'-gweh-o-no'
- Kanien'kehaka
- O-nun'-dā-ga-o-no'
- Nun-da'-wā-o-no'
- O-na'-yote-kā-o-no'

Five Nations Iroquois

- Cayuga
- Mohawk
- Onondaga
- Seneca
- Oneida

Huron-Wendat

- Attignawantan
- Ataronchronon
- Tahoutaerai
- Attigneonongnahac
- Arendaronon

Huron-Wendat

- Bear Nation
- People of the Marshes
- Deer Nation
- Cord Nation
- Nation of the Rock

People of the Longhouse

"This Old Island"

The Iroquoian people called their world "Turtle Island" or "This Old Island" (*Wendat Ehen* in Huron-Wendat), a reference to the turtle's back on which [Sky Woman](#) landed in the Iroquoian creation story.

The Iroquoian nations of the lower Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region spoke related languages, and shared an agricultural way of life. They lived in villages made up of large wooden longhouses, surrounded by defensive palisades.

The two most widely known Iroquoian groups were both confederacies of separate nations: the Huron-Wendat, who lived between Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay, and the Iroquois or Five Nations (later Six Nations), who lived south of the St. Lawrence Valley. Other Iroquoian nations included the Khionontateronon (Petun), the Attiuoindaron (Neutral), the Ahouenrochrhonon (Wenro), the Eriehroron (Erie) and the St. Lawrence Iroquoians.



CASE WESTERN RESERVE
UNIVERSITY EST. 1826
think beyond the possible™

© 2020 Case Western Reserve University



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CLEVELAND HISTORY

Campus Location:

Mather House, Room 308
11201 Euclid Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44106