

The Oneida Tribe of Indians has its origins in Central New York State, as members of the Iroquoian Six Nations Confederacy. The Oneidas had permanently established, well constructed settlements, protected by log palisades. The Oneidas lived primarily by agriculture, especially growing corn, beans and squash, and supplemented their diets by hunting, fishing and gathering natural vegetation. The Oneidas were and are composed of three clans: The Wolf, The Tutrle and the Bear. Each group was headed by three Sachems (or Chiefs) who governed with a stern hand and were responsible for the moral, social and economic life of their people.

The Oneidas supported the Colonists during the American Revolution, providing much needed provisions and fighting along side the colonists in several campaigns. After the war a grateful nation reimbursed the Oneidas for their losses and were promised their lands forever. The State of New York, however, was interested in the lands of the Oneidas. Taking advantage of the disruption of the Tribe after the revolutionary conflict, New York acquired all of the Oneida lands through a series of 26 treaties.

The Oneidas then moved to Wisconsin, in a series of moves beginning in 1822. They were led west by the Reverend Eleazer Williams, an Episcopal (Anglican) priest. They settled in what is now the northern portion of the Oneida Resevration outside Green Bay, Wisconsin. In this area, the Oneidas originally were to have receive more than 6-million acres of land from the Menominee and Winnebago Tribes. However, that area was reduced to the present 65,500 acres in a series of decisions by the federal government, including one by a United States President.

The area in Wisconsin where the Oneidas settled (and now live) is similar in weather and topography to the area where they had lived in New York.

The Oneida Dancers were formed more than 15 years ago. The group has toured major cities throughout the midwest, Florida, New York and the southwest. It consists of more than two dozen men and women. Each creates his own costume.

The songs and dances performed by the group are all of a social nature. Oneida religious songs and dances are performed only in connection with specific religious ceremonies.

The group begins its dance program with a round dance. The dancers begin counter-clockwise around the drum. After a while, the dancers reverse their direction. One direction represents all the good things of life; the opposite direction representing all the bad. This symbolism represents the words of the Creator when He said there is a light and a dark and a good and a bad. and there has to be a balance.

Other dances performed by the group include:

The Mocassin Dance

Women's Song

War Dance

Contest Dance

Alligator Dance

Snake Dance

and others