

## Chicago Natural History Museum

FOUNDED BY MARSHALL FIELD, 1893

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Members are requested to inform the Museum promptly of changes of address.

## MEN WERE ELECTED, BUT ONLY WOMEN VOTED

THERE WAS A TIME when a large segment of the American female population controlled the politics of its territory. Long before women of Western cultures began fighting for suffrage, the Iroquois Indians had an electoral system that enabled women to run things in the Eastern Woodlands.

Some men will yawn at this, having contended grudgingly that women took over and began running everything long ago. But most males will agree that politics is still predominantly a man's realm. Certainly at the forthcoming Republican and Democratic national conventions, women delegates will still be heavily outnumbered by the men. Nevertheless, of course, in choosing a candidate the men will have to consider the huge vote of the women in the November election.

### WOMEN HAD THE SAY

Among the Iroquois Indians, however, the choosing of candidates for chieftains was done entirely by the women. The Iroquois in the United States now number only in the hundreds, living mostly on reservations in New York state, and the old tribal organization is no longer maintained. But until the American Revolution, although

chiefs were chosen from among the men, the women's influence was so strong that the tribal councils could be said to consist of the women's representatives.

Fifty great peace chiefs made up a council representing all the Iroquois tribes and clans, and these were vested for their lifetimes with supreme executive, legislative, and judicial authority. Each tribe had within it a few particularly select and privileged households that held the hereditary right to elect chiefs to represent the tribe. Iroquois women, not men, owned the houses and property, passed their names on to the children, and elected the chiefs.

When a vacancy on the council was to be filled, the household's chief matron consulted with a few older women of the house to select a candidate from among her sons and grandsons. The Iroquois long-houses contained many people, each family unit maintaining its own "apartment" within the house, but because descent was counted through the female line, husbands were looked upon more as boarders than as part of the family, and the power was in the hands of the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters.

### REGENT SOMETIMES A WOMAN

After a candidate was nominated, the chief matron called a council meeting of all the women of child-bearing age in the house and invited clanswomen from other households, too. If the choice was ratified, the new chief dropped his own name and took the name of the deceased chief, which was also the hereditary title of the office. If an infant was elected, which sometimes happened since close relatives were preferred to more distant ones, a regent discharged his duties until he matured, and this regent was sometimes a woman.

If a chief lost the respect and confidence of his constituents, the chief matron of his household, after warning him twice, could have him impeached in the same way he was elected. So since both impeachment and nominating powers were vested exclusively in the women, they wielded powerful control even though they did not themselves actually hold the chieftainships. However, there was a special class of lesser chiefs called "pine-tree chiefs" similarly nominated and elected, who served as advisers to the chiefs. Held for life, though not hereditary, these influential offices could be and were occasionally taken by women.

An exhibit in Mary D. Sturges Hall (Hall 5) illustrates the Iroquois matrilineal system, which was largely responsible for the women's control of the electoral system of the Iroquois.

*To him who in the love of Nature holds  
Communion with her visible forms, she  
speaks  
A various language.*

—BRYANT

## THIS MONTH'S COVER

Rapture, excitement, delight, fascination, amusement, complete absorption, and as many other responses as there are faces show up in an audience of children at Museum movies. The films are not galloping and shooting westerns; natural-history films prove just as appealing. Every spring, summer, and autumn the Museum plays host to thousands of children at series of free programs in the James Simpson Theatre. This summer's schedule of programs at 10 and 11 o'clock on six successive Thursday mornings beginning with July 10 will be found on page 8. This time there's even one cowboy program—real cowboys at work on a real ranch, with plenty of riding but no shooting.

## MUSEUM SERVES AS HAVEN TO CHILDREN IN SUMMER

Chicago schools closed on June 27. Parents seeking safe, cool, and entertaining havens in which to leave their children for a day or part of a day during the long summer vacation are reminded that the provision of such a place is one of the community services rendered by the Museum. It is open every day from 9 A.M. to 6 P.M. and admission is always free to children.

The Museum welcomes all visitors, children and adults alike, at all times. In issuing the special invitation to children, Director Clifford C. Gregg stresses, however, that the Museum is *not* offering to take small children under its wing on a day-nursery basis, as some parents have occasionally interpreted similar summer-vacation invitations in past years.

### Difficult Assignment

A researcher for a television producer recently called the Museum and said:

"We have a spot on our program we would like to devote to Museum material. We would like a speaker to tell, and demonstrate with graphic material, the story of the origin and development of the earth, and also the origin and development of man."

"That would cover a span of one to three billion years. How much time would we be allotted on the program?" the Museum representative asked.

Answer: "Two minutes."

The Lamaist religion, a form of Buddhism introduced into Tibet from India, is illustrated in Hall 32 by images, paintings, sculptures, musical instruments, and other objects used in Lama temples.





1952. "Men Were Elected But Only Women Voted." *Bulletin* 23(7), 2-2.

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