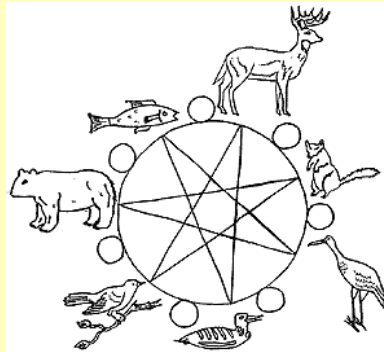


OJIBWE CLAN SYSTEM



Adapted from the Mishomis Book: *The Voice of the Ojibwe*; Benton, Banai, Edward.
Saint Paul, Minnesota: Indian Country Press, Inc. 1981

People of all nations have the same basic needs: food, protection, education, medicine and leadership. The Ojibwe Clan System was created to ensure these needs were met for the Ojibwe people. There were seven original clans, each with a different responsibility. An animal emblem or totem represented each clan and symbolized the clan's strength and duties.

The Crane and the Loon Clans were the two Chief Clans; members of this clan were given the power of Chieftainship. These two clans worked together to give the people a balanced government. The leaders of these clans provided a check on the other to make sure only good decisions were made for the Ojibwe people.

Between the two Chief Clans was the Fish Clan. The people of the Fish Clan were the teachers and scholars. Members of this clan helped children develop skills and healthy spirits. Fish Clan members also used their wisdom to solve disputes between the leaders of the Crane and Loon Clans.



Bear Clan members were the police and legal guardians. Members of this clan spent a lot of time patrolling the land surrounding the village. They learned which roots, bark, and plants could be used for medicines to treat the ailments of their people.



The people of the Hoof Clan were gentle, like the deer and moose or caribou from which they get their name. They cared for other Ojibwe people by making sure the community had proper housing and recreation. The Hoof Clan people were also the poets and pacifists who avoided all harsh words.

Long ago, warriors fought to defend their village or hunting territory. The people of the Marten Clan were the hunters, food gatherers and warriors who defended their people. The members of this clan were known as master strategists in planning the defense of their people.



The members of the Bird Clan represented the spiritual leaders of the people. The Bear Clan gave the nation its vision of well being and its highest development of the spirit. The people of the Bird Clan were said to possess the characteristics of the eagle, the head of their clan. The Ojibwe believed that members of the Bird Clan pursued the highest elevations of the mind just as the eagle pursues the highest elevations of the sky.

To meet the needs of the nation, the clans cooperated and collaborated to achieve their goals. The Clan System was built on foundations of equal justice, voice, law and order. The Ojibwe Clan System reinforced the teachings and principles of a sacred way of life. Today some people still follow their clan duties, but, for the most part, the original force and power of the Clan System has diminished to a degree of almost non-existence.

For more information about the Ojibwe People, visit
www.glifwc.org/publications/fall99/clansystem.htm