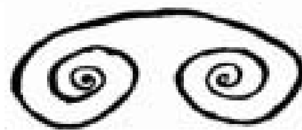
THE QUARTERLY

Official Publication of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association

January 1988



Set up the drum.
Winter's on the creek.

Dark men sit in dark kitchens.
Words move the air.
A neighbor is sick.
Needs prayer.

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VOLUME XXXIII JANUARY 1988 NO. 1

AKWESASNE ISSUE

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Cover: The cover drawing by John Kahionhes Fadden is reprinted by permission of Kahionhes (John Fadden) and Strawberry Press from *Visions in Ink*, 1983. The accompanying excerpt from "December" by Maurice Kenny is reprinted by permission of Maurice Kenny and White Pine Press from *Between Two Rivers*, 1987. A brief explanation of the drawing and the entire text of "December" can be found on page 4 of this issue.

Iroquoian Montage (ink on paper drawing by John Kahionhes Fadden)

Akwesasne, the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation, is unique among the reservations of the United States and Canada in that it is divided by both the United States-Canadian border and the Ontario-Quebec Provincial border. The external governments of Akwesasne include two countries, two provinces, and one state, all within a land area of approximately thirty-eight square miles. Internal governments of Akwesasne include the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, recognized by Canada; the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council, recognized by the United States, and the Mohawk Nation Council, the Akwesasne Longhouse, which recognizes no boundaries within the reservation and is officially recognized by no external government. The interests of these governmental bodies often conflict, and the much publicized internal disharmony of the community is largely the result of continuing external interference.

Less publicized is the harmony of Akwesasne. Within its quiet strength the artists continue to express their dreams and visions, the writers continue retelling the tales of the oral tradition, joining the past with the present and the future, and the basketmakers of Akwesasne continue to sculpt. Museums continue to be built, schools expand, libraries outgrow their space and are built anew, new housing is built for senior citizens, and the family remains paramount. The community, in its heart, is one, and the eagle continues to watch over Iroquoian lands.

NNJ

December

Set up the drum.
Winter's on the creek.

Dark men sit in dark kitchens.
Words move the air.
A neighbor is sick.
Needs prayer.

Women thaw frozen
strawberries.

In the dark room . . . a drum.

Kids hang out
eating burgers
at MacDonalds.
The Williams' boy
is drunk.

Set up the drum.

Berries thaw,
are crushed,
fingers stained, and tongues.

Set up the drum.
A neighbor is sick.
Say a prayer.
Dark men sit in dark kitchens.

Wind rattles the moon.

Drawing at right by John Kahionhes Fadden depicts a healing ceremony. The design at the bottom is a symbol which represents negative forces, in this case severe illness. The plant design opposite at the top is a positive symbol indicative of the desired result of the healing ceremony. The bowl contains strawberries, a fruit especially revered by the Iroquois. This drawing was originally executed to accompany the poem "December." (untitled drawing reprinted by permission of John Fadden and Strawberry Press from *Visions in Ink*, 1983; "December" and "Wild Strawberry" reprinted by permission of Maurice Kenny and White Pine Press from *Between Two Rivers*, 1987)

Wild Strawberry

For Helene

And I rode the Greyhound down to Brooklyn
where I sit now eating woody strawberries
grown on the backs of Mexican farmers
imported from the fields of their hands,
juices without color or sweetness

my wild blood berries of spring meadows
sucked by June bees and protected by hawks
have stained my face and honeyed
my tongue . . . healed the sorrow in my flesh

vines crawl across the grassy floor
of the north, scatter to the world
seeking the light of the sun and innocent
tap of the rain to feed the roots
and bud small white flowers that in June
will burst fruit and announce spring
when wolf will drop winter fur
and wrens will break the egg

my blood, blood berries that brought laughter
and the ache in the stooped back that vied
with dandelions for the plucking,
and the wines nourished our youth and heralded
iris, corn and summer melon

we fought bluebirds for the seeds
armed against garter snakes, field mice;
won the battle with the burning sun
which blinded our eyes and froze our hands
to the vines and the earth where knees knelt
and we laughed in the morning dew like worms
and grubs; we scented age and wisdom

my mother wrapped the wounds of the world
with a sassafras poultice and we ate
wild berries with their juices running
down the roots of our mouths and our joy

I sit here in Brooklyn eating Mexican
berries which I did not pick, nor do
I know the hands which did, nor their stories . .
January snow falls, listen . . .

Maurice Kenny

About the Poet:
Maurice Kenny is among the foremost contemporary Native American poets. Co-editor of Contact II, a poetry journal, and publisher of Strawberry Press, Kenny has made it possible for many emerging Native poets to become known. Pulitzer Prize nominee for *Blackrobe*, 1983, and recipient of the American Book Award for *The Mama Poems*, 1984, his most recent collection is *Between Two Rivers*. *Quarterly* readers will want to read "Dug-Out: A Mohawk Speaks to a Salvaged Past." Published in the June 1987 *Adirondack Life*, "Dug-Out" is Kenny's account of the excavation of two between 400 and 500 year old dug-out canoes discovered near Malone in 1984.

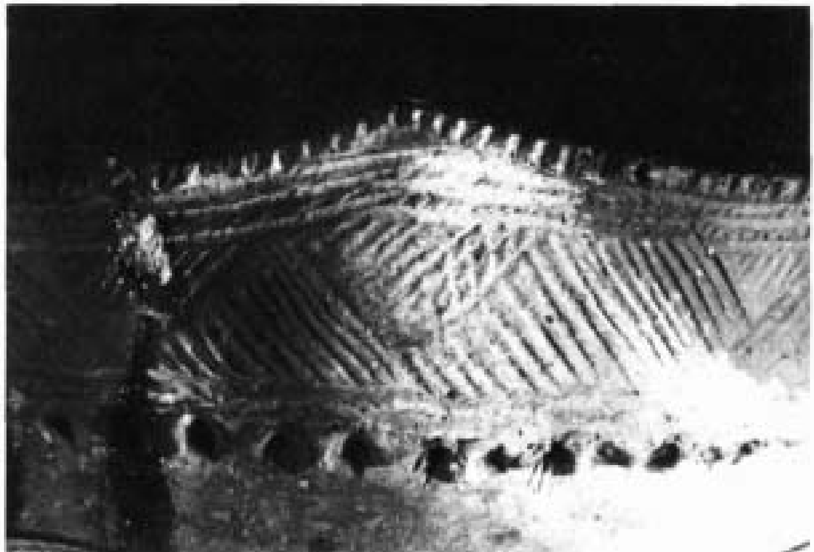
About the Artist:
John Kahionhes Fadden, whose drawings appear throughout this issue, is a well known Native artist and illustrator. The major collection of his drawings to date is *Visions in Ink: Drawings of Native Nations*, Strawberry Press, 1983.

Six Nations Indian Museum: Three Generations

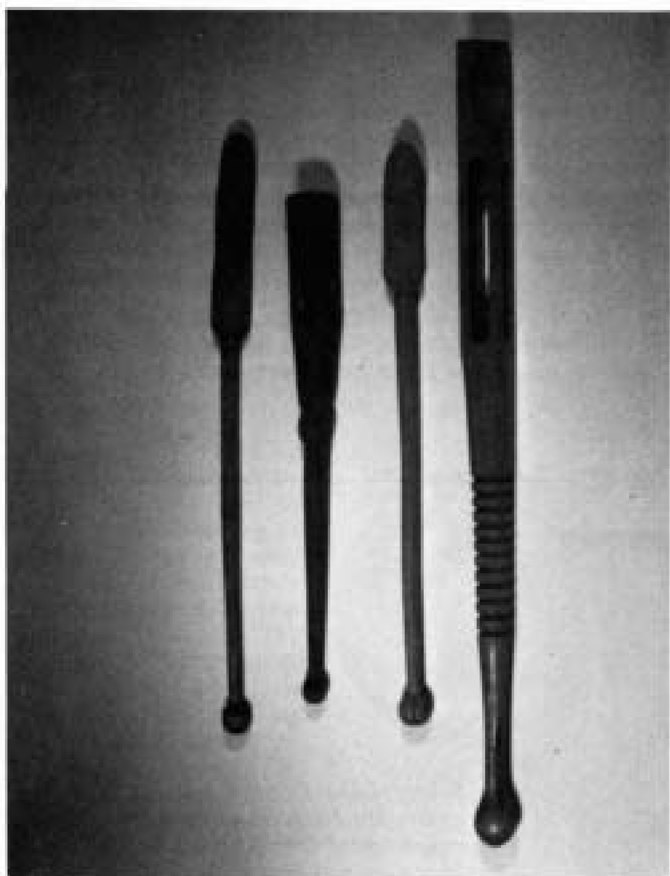
by John Kahionhes Fadden

A visit to the Six Nations Indian Museum is apt to be an intense experience. Every place one looks, on the walls, on the sloping ceilings, in display cases, even outside around the building, there are displays. Intermixed with these displays are books, pamphlets, posters, and charts. The museum is an example of education at its best. In a time when there were no accurate materials on Iroquoian life available for school age boys and girls, Ray Fadden went from territory to territory, speaking with elders to learn the knowledge of the people. Whenever possible, he included substantiating work by historians and other scholars. For the visitor, sitting on a long narrow green bench, the artifacts begin to come alive during the presentation of "messages" by the Faddens which supplant the old stereotypes of Indians. Included among these messages are strong reminders of the way in which mankind must learn to live in harmony with nature, as did Native peoples. Native and non-Native, countless lives have been enriched by the collective efforts of the Fadden family. Niawen.

Silver Lake Pottery Bowl. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)



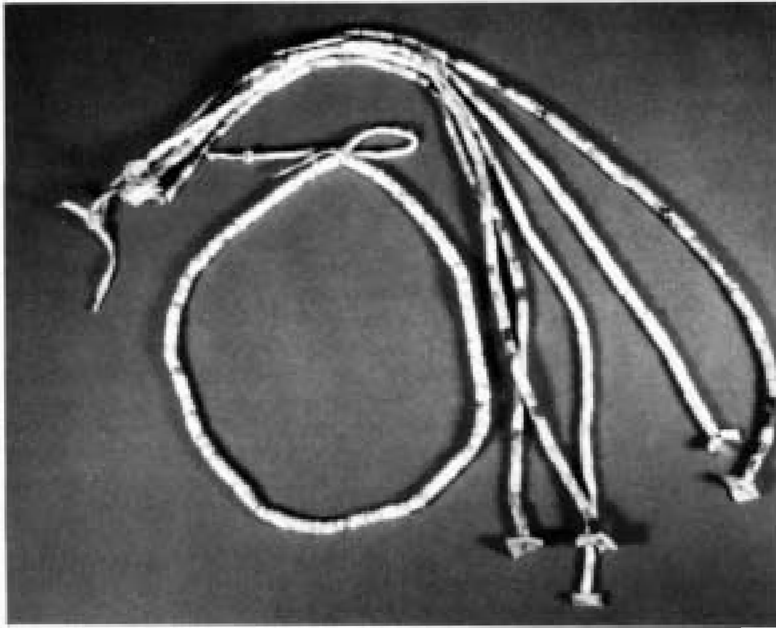
Detail, Silver Lake Pottery Bowl. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)



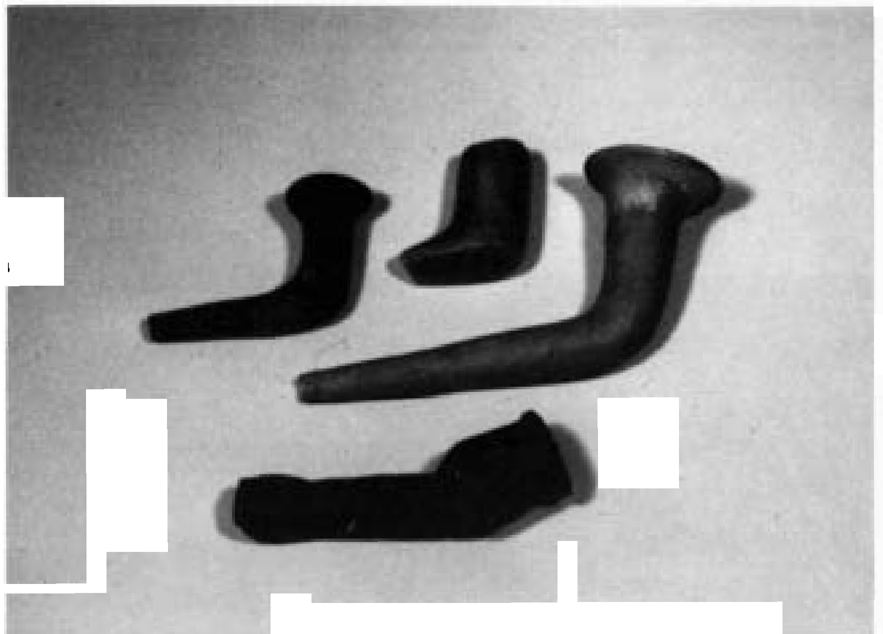
Mohawk drum beaters. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Musuem)

Iroquoian rattles. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

Iroquoian Water Drums. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

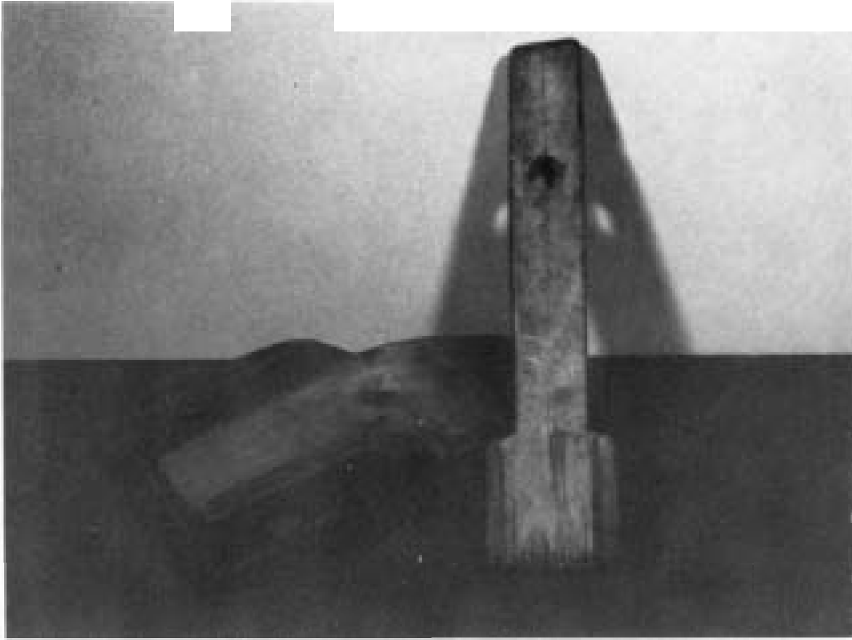


Disk and cylindrical wampum. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)



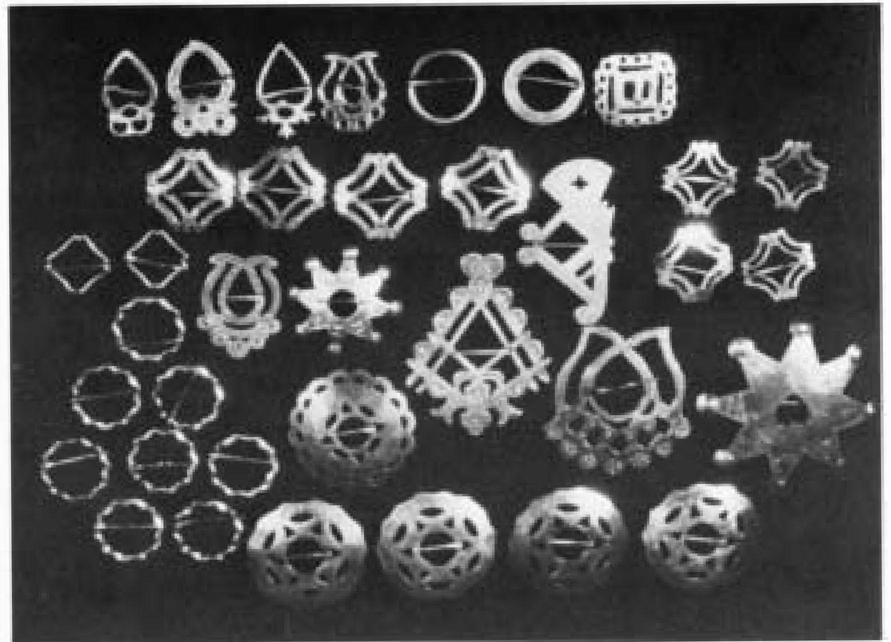
Iroquoian pipes. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

Iroquoian flute. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

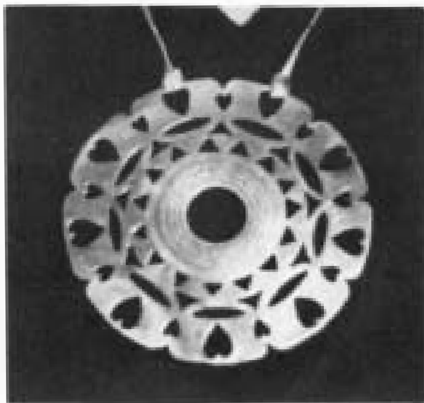


Splint cutter gauges. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

Iroquoian baskets. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)



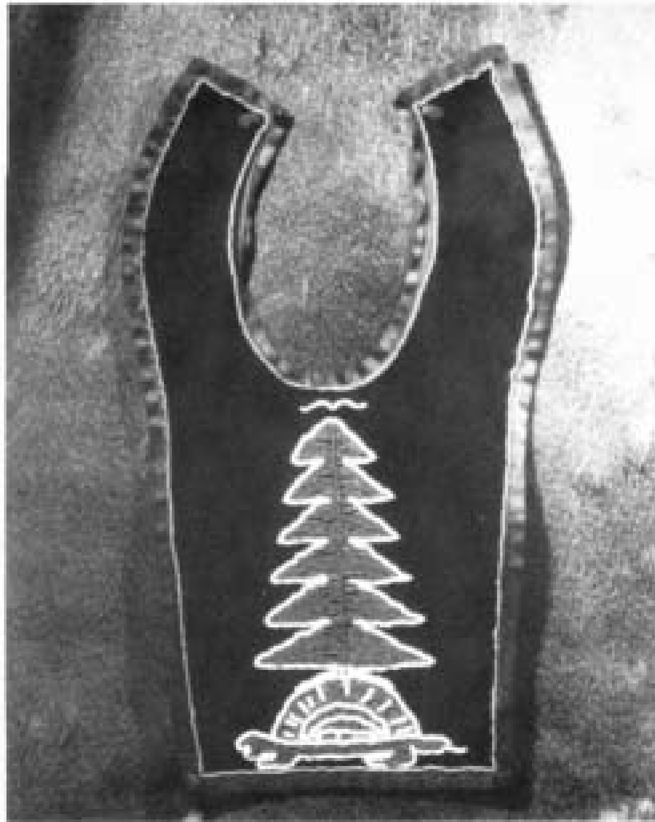
Iroquoian silver brooches. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)



Oneida silver medallion. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

Iroquoian gustoweh. Tribal affiliation is indicated by the number and placement of the feathers. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

Iroquois child's moccasins. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)



Mohawk neck piece, Tree of Peace. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

Iroquois clan carvings by Eva Fadden. Clockwise from the top the clans are hawk, snipe, wolf, turtle, deer, eel, beaver, bear, heron. (Collection of Museum of the Iroquois Indian, Schoharie, New York, photograph courtesy of Eva Fadden)

Miniature bark house. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

During an autumn day over three decades ago, Frank Woodruff, of Saranac, New York, sought shelter from the wet snow of an Adirondack weather pattern. He found cover beneath a natural lean-to which had been formed by massive boulders beneath the face of a cliff near Silver Lake Mountain. As he waited for the snow to abate, and upon viewing his surroundings, he noted a man-made object within the "lean-to." He had discovered an Iroquoian pottery bowl.

This Iroquoian bowl, with typical castellations (raised points) on its distinct collar, is evidence of continued Native American habitation within the Adirondacks. A transitory hunting or fishing party would not carry a cumbersome bowl. The bowl suggests familial habitation. This discovery added further evidence to the Adirondack sites listed in William D. Beauchamp's 1900 publication, *Aboriginal Occupation of New York*. Potsherds, arrow heads and celts have been discovered throughout the Adirondacks, including such places as Long Lake, Tupper Lake, St. Regis Mountain, Cranberry Lake, and Indian Lake.

One of her favorite subjects, this raccoon by Eva Fadden is carved from white pine, painted with acrylic paint, and the lines of fur are burned in with a burning pen. (Photograph courtesy of Eva Fadden)

The Silver Lake bowl was eventually donated to the Six Nations Indian Museum. The Museum is located near Onchiota, New York, within a twenty minute drive from Silver Lake, and it is this fact that makes the bowl a particularly meaningful possession. The bowl is housed in a glass case which is in one of the four rooms of the museum. If the bowl had an awareness it would feel right at home as it is surrounded by many other artifacts of Iroquoian origin.

This sizeable collection was gathered during the lifetime of the museum's founder and curator, my father, Ray Fadden. The museum is the result of the fact that at some time during my father's youth a spark of interest regarding indigenous people was ignited. His interest grew as did his knowledge. He did much reading on the subject, as well as travelling to various Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy) communities throughout the Northeast. In addition to learning much within these various communities, he developed lifelong friendships.

In time my father became an educator, and his career in that profession began on the Tuscarora Reservation near Sanborn, New York. While there, he met and married my mother, Christine Chubb of Akwesasne. In the late '30s they moved north again when my father began teaching at the elementary school at Akwesasne. During this time I was born.

For almost two decades Dad taught at Akwesasne. He also began to produce a series of publications dealing with various aspects of the Haudenosaunee. At that time very few publications were available, and he attempted to fill this gap in knowledge regarding the history, contributions, and contemporary realities of the Haudenosaunee and other indigenous nations.

Also during this period he founded a youth club called the Akwesasne Mohawk Councilor Organiztion. The emphasis of the organization was to instill pride within Mohawk youth, based on historical fact, and to develop personal integrity, strength and self-confidence. The latter was accomplished by hiking, camping, canoeing, and participating in other woodcraft activities. These events occurred on and near the site of the eventual Six Nations Indian Museum. In addition, and of equal importance to club members, many miles of travel to historic sites throughout the Northeast were experienced.

My father combined his cultural knowledge with his creative nature by producing various Haudenosaunee cultural forms. He has structured various beaded story belts, gustowehs, leggings, shirts, drums, rattles, and other items of Haudenosaunee culture. He gathered similar objects produced by other Haudenosaunee artists. His collection reached a point where our living room began to look like a museum! Finally, after saving the necessary funds, my parents decided to fulfill their dream of having a place where these objects and expressions of indigenous views could be exhibited. During the fall of 1954, with the help of a local carpenter, we began work on the structure which was to become the Six Nations Indian Museum. The museum was built in the Adirondacks near Onchiota, New York. During 1957 we moved from Akwesasne to Onchiota, permanently settling within the Adirondacks.

Necessitated by the fact that ten months of the year are devoted to formal educational activities (I'm a teacher too), the museum has always been open during the months of summer vacation. Due to the lack of available funds for extensive advertisement, and also because of its remote location, the number of visitors to our museum has not been overwhelming. The size of our family workforce, especially during the museum's inception, was not sufficient to handle large crowds. Groups of thirty to forty people stretched the building's capacity. Smaller groups and families are comfortably contained. An important aspect of the smaller groups is that time and space are available to communicate various aspects of Haudenosaunee culture more effectively. The visitors are able to have their questions answered on a more personal basis.

Since the earlier days of the museum's existence our workforce has multiplied. In 1965 I made the most important and wisest decision that I have ever made. During July of that year I married Elizabeth Eva Thompson of Kawenokeh, Akwesasne. Eva's creative capabilities, which include the sculpturing of wildlife figures from wood, have resulted in more space-

This diorama was produced by a talent collective. The animals were carved by Eva Fadden, the figure and background painting was done by John Fadden, Gary LeFebvre made the sled and the harnesses, and Lane W. Knight artfully arranged the box-lighting and surface environment. (Photograph courtesy of John and Eva Fadden)

efficient designing of the museum's interior. She and my mother, Christine, continue to introduce a variety of Native American articles to the museum's modest craft store.

The seasonal activity of our museum has provided a unique cultural atmosphere for the three children in our family. Don, who is now 21 years old, as an infant played on the bearskin rugs. David's 17 years included the "arduous" activity of feeding the chipmunks and squirrels on the front porch of the museum's entrance. The ten summers of Danny's existence have been filled with similar activities, including assisting his mother and grandmother behind the craft shop counter.

The cultural and family legacy of the museum has been an integral part of the developing lives of the three boys. The effect upon their personalities from their experiences in the museum is incalcuable. Time will judge and determine the effects of this unique upbringing.

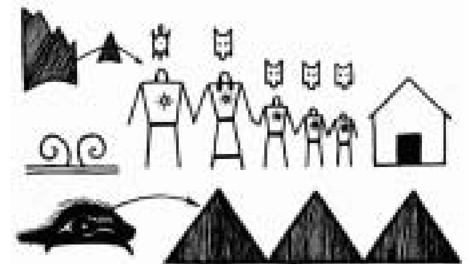
Our family has had many good experiences at the museum. We have met many different and interesting people. We have had American visitors, Canadian, European, Asian, and as can be expected, people from many Native Nations have visited the museum. Their welcome attendance, as with all visitors, is rewarded with the telling of stories, legends, and historical accounts. A useful method has been the telling of stories using beaded record belts. The pictographic images woven with seed-beads "remind" the storyteller of the story and also act as an attractive visual stimulus to the listener.

The sharing of information works two ways within the setting of the museum. Visitors often give us information that is eventually "recycled" to other visitors. During this past summer, for example, Donald Grinde, of California Polytechnic University, stopped in as he was returning from a research foray in the archives in Ottawa. Grinde is researching the subject of Haudenosaunee influence upon the United States Constitution. He shared some of his Ottawa findings with us.

Don Grinde found material in Ottawa that relates to Governor John Rutledge of South Carolina. Rutledge was the chairman of the Committee of Detail during the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Rutledge, during his introductory comments, referred to the constitution called the Great Law that had been developed centuries ago by the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee). He referred to the fact that those gathered before him were born of this soil as was the Constitution of the Haudenosaunee, and that fact should be given serious consideration as they wrote their constitution.

The museum is quiet now. The outdoor exhibits are covered, the signs put away, and the shutters are closed. New displays are in the thinking stage, and will be produced during the winter months. Eventually, with the awakening of next season's seeds, the returning of the birds, and the release from hibernation of the bears, the museum will again open its doors to Spring in preparation for Summer's visitors.

About the Author



Family drawing

People of the flint; turtle clan man, wolf clan woman, their children, wolf clan, family; house in forest among big plants in mountains called big porcupine (Ane'ntaks)

This drawing by John Kahionhes Fadden represents a Mohawk man, as evident from the three feathers in his gustoweh, holding wampum strings. Note the plant design on the shirt neck. (Drawing by John Kahionhes Fadden, reprinted by permission of the artist)

Iroquoian Use of Wampum

by Ateronhiatakon

*On well worn tourist trails, main and back road museums join "made by Indians" traders in describing wampum as "Indian money." However, the use of wampum by the Iroquois as a trade item was of secondary importance at most. Sir William Johnson wrote in 1753, "It is obvious to all who are the least acquainted with Indian affairs, that they regard no message or invitation, be it of what consequence it will, unless attended or confirmed by strings or belts of wampum, which they look upon as we our letters, or rather bonds."**

Onkwehonwe, the original people, have been instructed that, for whatever purpose the people come together, before all else comes the *Ohenten kariwatekwen*, the thoughts which bring our minds together to collectively express our gratitude. We address each other as brothers and sisters of the same creation, as friends and human beings, the way we are instructed to greet one another. We greet each other in peace and goodwill. We say good health to one another, so be it our minds. And the people reply, they will say *to* or *nio*. We give thanks to the earth, the giver of life, to the waters, to the plant life, to all of the animals, the insects and the fish, to the life and forces that are in the sky world, eldest brother sun, grandmother moon, the stars, to the four spiritual beings who guide our people, to Dekanawidah, the Peacemaker, to Ayonwentha, to Skanietariio, Handsome Lake, to Sonkoiatiasen, our Creator. We say thank you to Sonkoiatisen for giving us all these things and the continuation of our generations and the assurance that we have this love, that we have this peace, that we have this strength, and that we have this righteousness in our relationship with wherever you are listening to our words. So be it our minds.

I want to share the words of the people who are no longer with us, who in their teaching of me intended that I should pass on these words to a younger generation. There are many variations of these teachings, but I am going to share a verison that I heard while I was growing up and sitting in the longhouse listening. What I saw that impressed me was the respect and

*Letter of Sr. William Johnson, 1753. Doc. Hist. N.Y., vol. ii. p. 624.

Longhouse, Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne. (Photograph by Barry Montour, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

honor that my grandparents would show when they handled *ohnikohra*, wampum.

To the *Hodenosaunee*, the Iroquois people, wampum held, and holds, the special significance of a message given through a spiritual means. We are told that wampum was given to us a long time ago by Ayonwentha (Hiawatha), one of the very special men among our Iroquois people, who helped Dekanawidah, the Peacemaker, establish *Kaianerekowa*, the Great Peace, known as the League of the Five Nations or the Iroquois Confederacy. At the time Ayonwentha received these wampums he had lost his daughters. He was in great sadness, and he did not know what to do next. A message came to him as he was walking beside a lake, and in one version of the story a flock of geese came to this lake and picked up the water. On the remaining lake bed lay strings of wampum. Ayonwentha said, "If I ever meet a man who has this same grief, who has this same loss that I am feeling, here is what I would begin to say to him in condolences." He would say to him that life has to continue. Although we acknowledge a great loss in our life, we have to look at the life cycle that will continue. The sun will shine tomorrow, just as it did today. The moon will continue her direction. The Mother Earth will continue her cycles. And so it was that he found the words that are still used for the condolence messages today when our leaders, both men and women, pass away. Ayonwentha, a great statesman, in his grief, found in his heart what he would say to his fellow man who would be in the same condition as himself. The wampum is the evidence of the sincerity of the condolences.

Ohnikohra is made from the quahog shell. The quahog shell has two colors, an area where it is purely white, almost ivory, and areas that are more purplish. Wampum is made from both the ivory and the purplish areas. There are notations as to how the combinations of purple, white, and purple and white beads are strung. It is the significance of how they are strung that the interpreter or orator must remember and recite. This requires considerable insight and training. We say that a man who can do this has a gift given to him by a spiritual power, and that gift belongs to the people. It just flows through the orator: the gift does not belong to him, it is a gift that the people have been given through the orator.

The Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Cayuga, and Oneida nations comprise the [original] Confederacy. Each has a string of wampum beads. We refer to that string of beads as the nation's council fire, and it is a symbol present during councils. A fire is burning, and whatever words we use while this wampum is displayed have to be kind and gentle words. The nation council fire wampum is brought out for important national, inter-national, and multi-national meetings. It is known and acknowledged by the people that the bearer of this wampum belt represents the nation's one-minded consensus. When he speaks, he speaks with the collective in mind. That means the men elders, the women elders, the chiefs, the clan mothers, the faith keepers, the children, and even the future generations. And so you can perhaps imagine the commitment, the thorough peace, that wampum bearers must find in their own minds when they take wampum in their hands.

There are many, many different types of wampum. The messenger's wampum, for example, would be used for an announcement of a Grand Council (meeting of all nations of the Confederacy) or a nation's meeting. This wampum string is a short one fastened on a wooden stick, and the man who carries it is recognized by the

Mohawk wampum strings. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

The men would rarely dress as they did for this Grand Council of the Hodenosaunee at Onondaga, 1974. Dr. Mars, representative of President Ford, stands with the Hodenosaunee Chiefs holding the Two-Row Wampum. (Photograph by Ateronhiatakon)

nation. He is given this wampum and a message announcing a meeting. Often there are marks on the stick which indicate in how many days the meeting will be held. He will travel directly to the nation, where he will deliver this message, and only this message. Then he will return immediately to the source which sent the wampum out. The main purpose of the messenger's wampum is to give a specific message about a meeting or an issue which needs to be discussed and relates to the people as a whole.

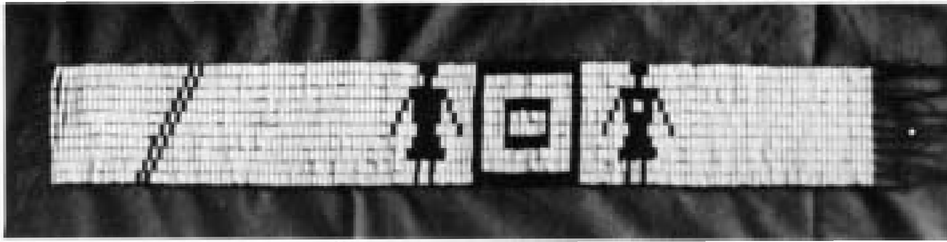
Wampum is the symbol of the authority that the women hold, and when there is a specific and important message that is to be exchanged, this wampum is brought out. The people will then know that this person is speaking from a particular family [clan] with an urgent message and that all should hear and adhere to the message that is being given.

Wampum historically was used to record agreements between the Hodenosaunee and other nations or governments. For example, when the Hodenosaunee met with the Dutch, they acknowledged each other's existence and developed a relationship. The Hodenosaunee understanding of that relationship is recorded in a belt called the *Kaswenta*. The *Kaswenta* is also known as the Two-Row Wampum belt, and there is a very special meaning for us in that belt, even today. The Two-Row Wampum belt is about 2½ feet long and has two purple parallel lines which run the length of the belt on a white background. This particular belt denotes the type of relationship the nations of the Hodenosaunee expected to have with the Dutch and other arriving nations for all time to come.

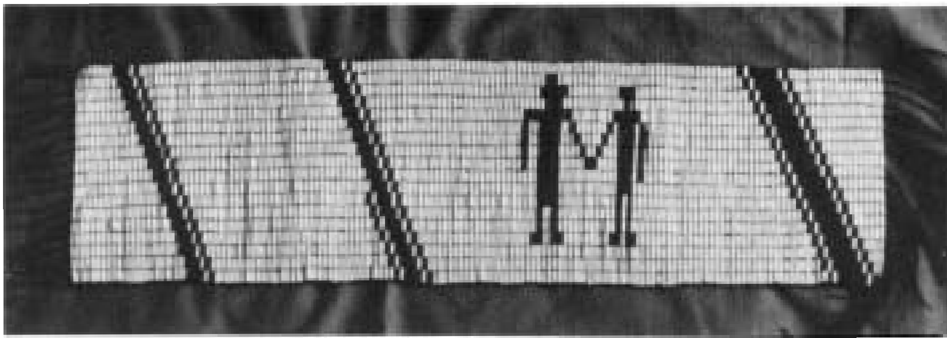
The *Kaswenta* represents the continuous flow of life. One purple row signifies the Onkwehonwe. In that row would be the canoe, and in the canoe would be the Onkwehonwe people, their language, their culture, their customs, and their ways. Whatever is important to their understanding of their own identity is there, complete for future generations. However, the Hodenosaunee acknowledged another row, and in that row would be the vessels of other nations, the Dutch in this case. The Dutch had their own language, culture, customs and ways; their past and future are in their vessel.

In their agreement with the Dutch, the Onkwehonwe said to them: we are not your son, we do not have a relationship in which your king will be our father, but rather we are equals and we are brothers; we are created as brothers and we can flow down the river of life, each in our respective vessels and canoe. We can have a relationship, a communication, an understanding about one another, but we are not to steer the other's vessel or canoe. This meant that neither the Dutch nor the Hodenosaunee were to legislate laws or influence in a detrimental way which would re-direct each other's full heritage, language, and culture. The example given is that if anyone crosses from the canoe to the vessel or the vessel to the canoe, there is a concern that there may be rough waters. A wind might come, and if there are people who are straddling these two vessels, there is fear that they might not survive that storm, the people might fall. That message, ancient as it is, has a very important significance today.

There are many, many ways in which the people symbolized words and happenings or future direction through wampum. One of the more common ones, and there are different versions of this, is the *Teiokiokwanhakton*, commonly referred to as the Circle of Unity wampum. This wampum commemorates the establishment of *Kiianorekowa*. The people wanted to remember how important unity is, so they strung two rows of wampum beads and made a circle which has two inter-woven strands. From this circle hang the strings which denote the



Reproduction of the First William Penn Belt. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)



Reproduction of the William Penn Belt. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

Reproduction of an Oneida wampum belt. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

positions, the authority of *Rotiahneson* and *Iotiahneson*, the Chiefs and Clan Mothers, which is to say the families. In this circle of wampum are the spaced denotations of nationhood. There is a denotation where the strand is much longer. This represents Tadodaho, who is the keeper of the central fire of the Hodenosaunee, Onondaga. The special message in this wampum, we are told, is that there is no issue more important than the peace and unity of the people. We should not allow anything to creep into the minds of the men and women who sit on this council which would be a deterrent or cause destruction to the total unity of the confederacy. The message specifies that each nation has to maintain unity, has to maintain peace, and their responsibility is expressed in words. Words are what we were given, and words are very important. Oratory is an important part of our teachings.

Very regularly, at Six Nations [the Tuscarora nation was given membership in the Confederacy after 1722] meetings what they are doing is taking the wampum belts and stretching them. This means they are making sure the wampum beads are, in fact, intact. At the same time they make sure that someone has the same strength as the leather thongs that hold the beads together. This means the orator's strength, the strength of living life that emanates from the wampum, to be able to speak and present the oratory surrounding the wampum belts, beads, and strings. An old piece of leather, as in nature, deteriorates over a number of years. Parts need to be replaced, fresh thongs are necessary, the belt must be made strong continuously. More importantly, the message that belongs to the belt must be fixed in memory to make sure that someone has that message to hand down.

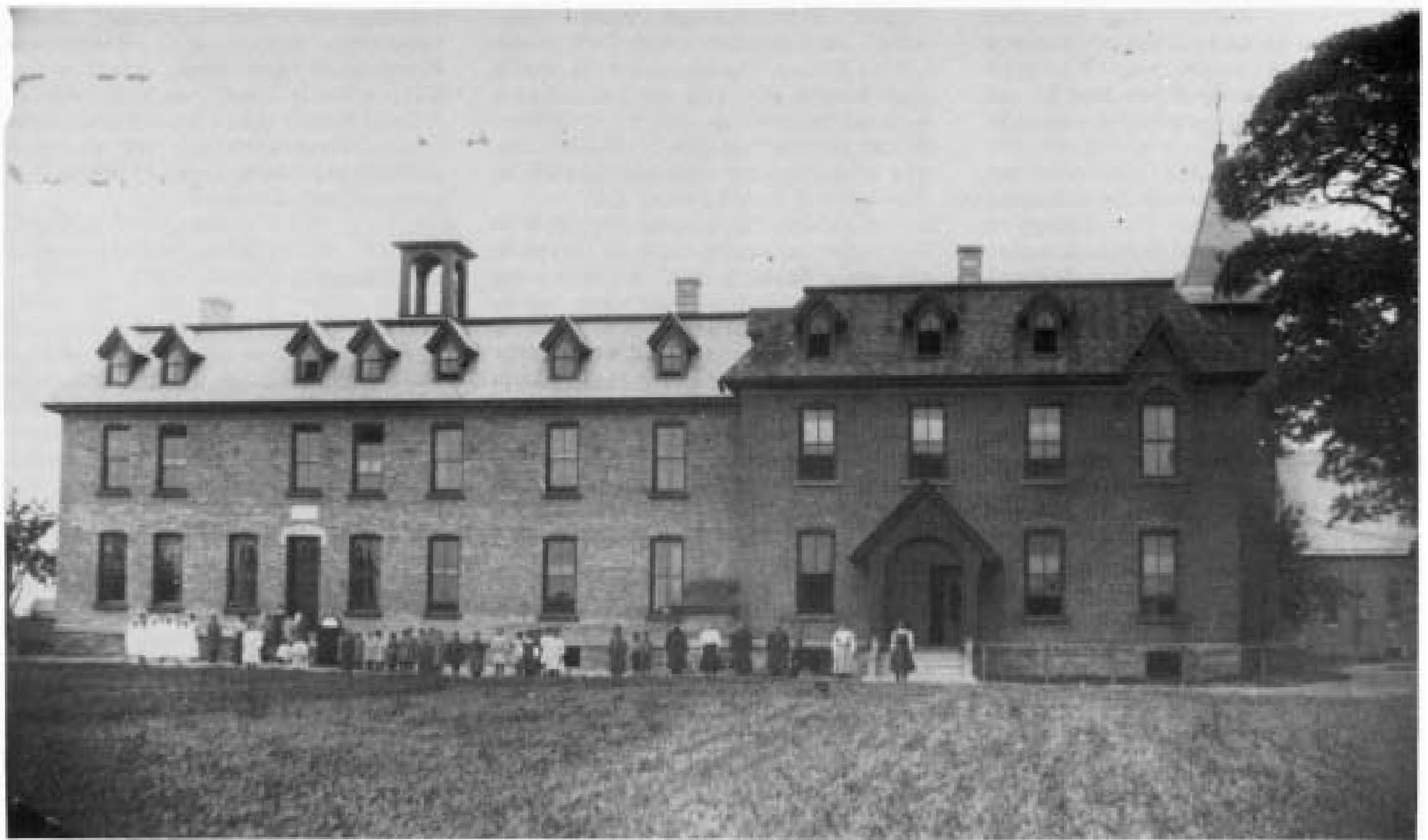
Always within the wampum message is the interpretation, and life experiences are included in the interpretation of these messages. And so the wampum is alive from one generation to the next. Today our wampums are in glass cases in museums throughout the world, and many of our own young people, our own Iroquois people, pass by these glass cases and look at our wampum belts in awe, wondering what they could have been used for because the museum did not include the tradition and the words of the belts in the displays. The wampum belts, beads, and strings are used as reminders for the speaker, but it is the speaker who knows the words. The wampum belts themselves do not speak; one has to know the culture, the language, the words, the feelings, the life around what happened with these wampums in order to understand the real significance, and when wampum belts are in display cases they do not generate that kind of spirituality. Sometimes I think that historians, although they don't mean to, perhaps want to put us in an historical time and they don't allow us to say "but it is alive today." This oratory is here today and we can still hear these things. We know the words today. Historians perhaps want us to say, well it used to be like that. Yes, it used to be like that, but it still is, and it will be for the future, and I believe this.

Further Reading:

Tehanetorens [Ray Fadden]. *Wampum Belts.* Onchiota, NY: Six Nations Indian Museum, n.d.

About the Author:

Ateronhiatakon is a member of the Snipe clan, Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne.



The St. Regis convent school for girls, circa 1900. (Photograph by Francis San Jule, collection of the Akwesasne Museum, courtesy of *Indian Time*)

"Indian" Education: An Interview With Minerva White

by Nadine N. Jennings

Minerva White has been a leader in the reformation of education for Native Americans since 1968. Her influence is visible at the local, state, and national levels. Presently the director of higher education programs for the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, Mrs. White has received considerable diverse recognition of her efforts. She received the North Country Citation from St. Lawrence University in 1979, an honorary doctor of humane letters from Clarkson University in 1977, and received the Medal of Excellence from the New York State Board of Regents in 1984. President Ford appointed her to a three-year term on the National Advisory Council on Indian Education in 1976, and President Jimmy Carter invited her to the White House in 1979 to brief officials on the Indian Libraries and Information Conference. Most recently, she was awarded an honorary doctorate of letters during the 97th Regents Academic Convocation, 1987. To the newcomer in any aspect of Native American education, at Akwesasne it sometimes seems that all roads lead to Minerva White.

NNJ: From the time the first Native American college graduate, Caleb Chaesahteamuk (Natick), left Harvard Indian College in 1665, there have been many redefinitions of the purpose and nature of Native American education. Would you like to discuss the historical reasons why from the colonial period, through the westward expansion and the treaty period, until the present day, education specifically for Native Americans has been a constant political and social issue?

MW: I think the approaches taken by the people in charge established the trend in the education of Indians. Education was used in the early days to achieve the objectives of non-Indians, which were to assimilate and "civilize" Indians. Therefore educational provisions usually appeared in the treaties. These provisions were made in exchange for Indian lands. An example of this appears in the treaty of December 2, 1794, which was made with the Oneida, Tuscarora, and Stockbridge Indians. The treaty provisions included instructing the young men of these three nations to become millers and sawyers, etc.

Also, the missionaries came to civilize and Christianize the Indians in the mission schools they established. This purpose was endorsed by the federal government because if the Indians were converted and changed from hunters to farmers, they would need less land. In fact, after the treaty period ended in 1871, the Congress

took up the cause of Indian education for the same reasons. The Act of March 30, 1871 was to promote civilization among the friendly tribes and for the continuation of securing friendships among the Indians.

It has been stated that this act formed the basis for all the following educational programs. This brings us to the boarding school era—when education was imposed on Indians. Indian families were separated and Indian children were sent to boarding schools. It also forced Indians to choose between white culture and Indian culture. There was never any compromise. Fortunately from time to time sympathetic people wrote reports that raised public sentiment, such as the Meriam Report, 1928, which brought to light the conditions and problems with the services to the Indians. It also brought attention to the fact that Indians were excluded from the management of these services.

So throughout our history, education for Indians was political and seen as a problem. I think that one of the reasons education for Indians became a problem was that we were left out of the planning process: no one ever asked the Indians what we wanted. This did not change until the late 1960's when Indians became more vocal about their situation.

NNJ: When you talk about the treaty between the Oneida, Tuscarora, and Stockbridge nations, and the stipulation that education would be provided for the Native people, what kind of education do you think the Native people had in mind?

MW: I think that Indian people were smart enough to realize that their survival was based on adapting. We're certainly examples of this today: we're still here. Therefore, it was in our best interests to learn how to adapt. I'm not saying that we wouldn't want the same kind of education as the non-Indians, but I think we always wanted both. We wanted to keep our culture and language along with the white man's education. I think they could see, as we do today, that there is no reason for us to have to choose. We want our children to be educated in the white man's education and to be very knowledgeable about our own culture and language.

NNJ: The two hundred percent education that people here talk about.

MW: Yes, that's Chief Lazore's quote.

NNJ: What types of courses were taught in the boarding schools?

MW: That was all strictly vocational. My mother went to Carlisle Indian School. She learned to become a good homemaker and she learned how to read and write, but most importantly, she learned how to keep a home. She remains very regimented even to this day and she's 84 years old.

I think that there were very few in the early days who were educated in academic fields. I think Indians were seen as the workers, certainly not as the teachers, back then.

NNJ: When Caleb Chaesahteamuk left Harvard Indian College, he was fluent in Latin, Greek, and English. By the boarding school period there seems to have been a considerable redefinition of appropriate education for Native Americans. Why do you think this occurred?

MW: Well from the first contact, Indian people were certainly looked down upon as uncivilized heathen savages, so certainly this negative attitude carried over into the boarding school era. Many of the Commissioners of Indian Affairs believed the stereotype of the heathen savage. For example, General Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle Indian School, stated that one should "kill the Indian and save the man." Also, the mood of the military and the country during this time was "the only good Indian is a dead Indian."

NNJ: What forms have these redefinitions of purposes and nature taken specifically with regard to the north country and Akwesasne?

MW: In 1846 New York State assumed the responsibility of educating the Indians within the state. This action improved education for Indians because New York State had higher educational standards, and these same standards were applied to Indians. The state constructed schools on reservations, made education compulsory for Indians, and placed schooling for Indians under the direct charge of the first superintendent of public instruction.

Additionally, as Indians became educated they continued to demand educational improvements. One interesting discovery that a colleague and I made when we did a research paper on the Carlisle Indian School was that although the school was established to assimilate and acculturate Indians, just the opposite happened. Most of the Mohawks who attended Carlisle returned home. They never forgot who they were, nor did they forget their language. After attending Carlisle, a number of them who returned here became leaders in our community.

Also, in 1930 the state closed the two reservation schools on the Tonawanda Reservation and began transporting Seneca children to the public schools in Akron, New York. This was the beginning of centralization and the state contracting with public schools to educate Indian children.

NNJ: When did centralization occur at St. Regis?

MW: Centralization and contracting began in 1954 at St. Regis. The state began contracting with the Salmon River Central School District for the education of Mohawk students. However, there was no provision for Indian representation on the school board, and this finally resulted in the boycott of 1968.

NNJ: Then essentially there were two systems at the same time?

MW: Prior to 1846 the St. Regis Mohawks could attend nearby schools, boarding schools such as the Carlisle Indian School, or not attend school at all. Nationally, Indians were educated in four types of schools: off reservation boarding schools, on reservation boarding schools, mission schools and, finally, in public schools. Today we continue to have boarding schools; however, they're like other independent schools.

NNJ: What kinds of problems happened at the Salmon River School that there wasn't any representation for?

MW: The lack of representation was our main concern, and there were numerous problems. If you asked the picketers at the time we were protesting outside the school, you would have heard various reasons, but the crux of the problem was that there was no Indian representation on the school board and Indians did not have a place to voice their concerns. If we went to the board, they would say "you go to New York State because they're in charge of Indian education." When we went to Albany, they would say "Well, we're paying Salmon River to educate those Indian kids, so go talk to the school board." Round and round we'd go, in a circle.

NNJ: So the problem essentially was that there wasn't any mechanism. It wasn't that the school board didn't want to have Native representation, it was that there was no mechanism to have it.

MW: It was both. We did not have a voice in the education of our children, and people in the district did not want Indian representation on the school

board because Indians do not pay school taxes.

NNJ: I know that legislation was eventually passed which allowed Native people to run for seats on the school board. How long a process was this?

MW: Two years.

NNJ: Is this federal legislation or state?

MW: State.

NNJ: How has the funding for instructional programs reflected the redefinitions of Indian education?

MW: After the centralization of Salmon River, the state contracted with various school boards to educate children. In our case, the state pays Salmon River an established amount of money for each child, depending on grade level and average daily attendance. There are nine contracting districts across the state. Massena Central School district is also a contracting district for this reservation; Mohawk students can go to either Massena or Salmon River schools. That was one of the agreements reached at the time of the 1968 boycott. We have always had a group of parents on the reservation who prefer to send their children to Massena, and they wanted that choice. The majority of the children, however, go to Salmon River.

NNJ: I'd like to change direction for our readers and ask you what made you become so active in education.

MW: I was selected to chair the education committee at a meeting back in 1968 and have continued my involvement since that time. It was really just being in the right place at the right time, and it changed my life.

NNJ: Since 1968 there have been major changes in attrition rates and the number of students going on to college. Can you compare the 1960's attrition rate with today's?

MW: At the time of the school boycott the attrition rate at Salmon River was 67 percent; now it fluctuates between 6 and 14 percent, which is below the national average. I think that's due to what we've done here. We became active and have been involved since 1968 in not only the education of Indian children, but in the education of adults. This combination creates change. Dr. Fox, a professor from St. Lawrence University who teaches here from time to time at the graduate level, says we've jumped one whole generation educationally, and I believe it's because we've educated the parents as well as the children.

NNJ: Did you deliberately plan to educate the parents as well as the children?

MW: It just happened. People wanted to be involved with other people in the '60s, so people like Dr. Wells, from St. Lawrence, came to see if they could help us in some way. We organized and set up the tutorial program in the Mohawk School. I had asked some parents to be in the building when the tutoring was taking place to sort of monitor the students. We soon found that the parents wanted to get their G.E.D. (General Equivalency Diploma), so we started a G.E.D. program.

As people passed their G.E.D. exams, they wanted more education. In the meantime, we had a small group who were travelling to Mater Dei College to take course work. So since we now had a nucleus of people interested, we worked to have courses offered here.

We're lucky because we are surrounded by colleges. We also used every available option the state offers, in particular the twenty-four-hour program, in which the G.E.D. is awarded upon the completion of twenty-four hours of college credit. Empire State College, Mater Dei College, and North Country Community College were the first institutions to offer college courses on the reservation. As people began completing their two-year degree and wanted to continue, St. Lawrence University began offering courses here at the Bachelor's and Master's levels. They continue to do so today.

In 1972 the Indian Education Act was passed by the Congress, and this Act made various dollars available to meet the special educational needs of Indian children. There were five components of that Act: Part A was for public schools of education; Part B went to tribes for pilot demonstration projects; Part C was for adult education; Part D was for the establishment of the advisory council, and Part E was to educate Indian professionals. This kind of comprehensive legislation gave us the resources to teach the Mohawk language and culture in Salmon River and Massena Central Schools. We also found that the people who were fluent in the language did not have the credentials to teach in the schools, so Title IV, as it is commonly called, helped to educate the people who were teaching in the schools before they had a degree. We sort of went backwards because in New York State a person can teach Native languages or culture in public schools while taking a minimum of six hours of college credit per year. However, today most of our teachers at the Salmon River Central School have their Bachelor's degree and are provisionally certified. In fact, most are working on their Master's. This is not the case in Indian Country nationwide.

In my travels across the country I've found that there are very few colleges willing to go to the reservations to teach Indians, so St. Lawrence and Mater Dei are doing something unique and special.

NNJ: When you think about the future, how do you see this trend continuing.?

MW: Well, I have some worries about the future because every once in a while we hear about Gramm-Rudman. And that concerns me. I know we need a balanced budget, but I know that to get a balanced budget there are going to be cuts, and I also hear that cuts are going to be made across the board. And we will be part of those across the board cuts. I guess the dilemma is how do we maintain these programs in the school districts without federal dollars. So far the school districts have not paid for any of it. My concern is how will we maintain these programs. It is very difficult to sit on a school board and convince other people of the importance of teaching the Mohawk language and culture, and also convince them to expend monies for this purpose. Another concern is to maintain the Indian involvement on school boards, and Indian people have to make some changes themselves. We must be just as concerned with voting for school board members as we are with voting for tribal chiefs. To me it's just as important: convincing others of this is not easy.

NNJ: Is there anything we haven't talked about today that you would like to include in this discussion?

MW: I want to talk about the direction that the state has taken recently. We're the only state in the United States which has a Board of Regents, and this Board has a statement of policy regarding the education of Indians. We also have a Native American Advisory Council to the Commissioner of Education. I'm chairing that right now; we're one year old. Also, the committee and Dr. Hazel Dean-John (Seneca), Supervisor of the Native American Education Unit, are working on establishing a Native language curriculum for the state. We're also working on the certification of our

Construction was begun on the Mohawk School in Hogansburg in 1935. The first class was held in 1937, the building was completed in 1940, renovated in 1953 to include a pre-kindergarten and cafeteria, wings housing the library and storeroom were added in 1981, and the building is currently undergoing further renovation. (circa 1950 photograph by Dwight Church, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

Native language teachers. The post-secondary grant-in-aid was raised this year. Presently the contracting schools have to meet twice with the reservation leaders and/or education committee before the contract is signed for the year, and there will be other things in the future.

When I served on the National Advisory Committee for the education of Indians, I traveled across the country and I always came back here appreciating New York State. This state is really involved with Indian people. You know Regent Laura Chodos comes and visits our reservation and makes it her business to know what is happening here. She certainly is an advocate for Indian education and a good friend to the Mohawks.

NNJ: How would you like to conclude this discussion?

MW: I would like to emphasize that if Indian people become organized, there is really no end to what can happen. I guess that I would want people to think that maybe the educational future of Akwesasne would be the establishment of a community college. I think we have people educated enough to look into this.

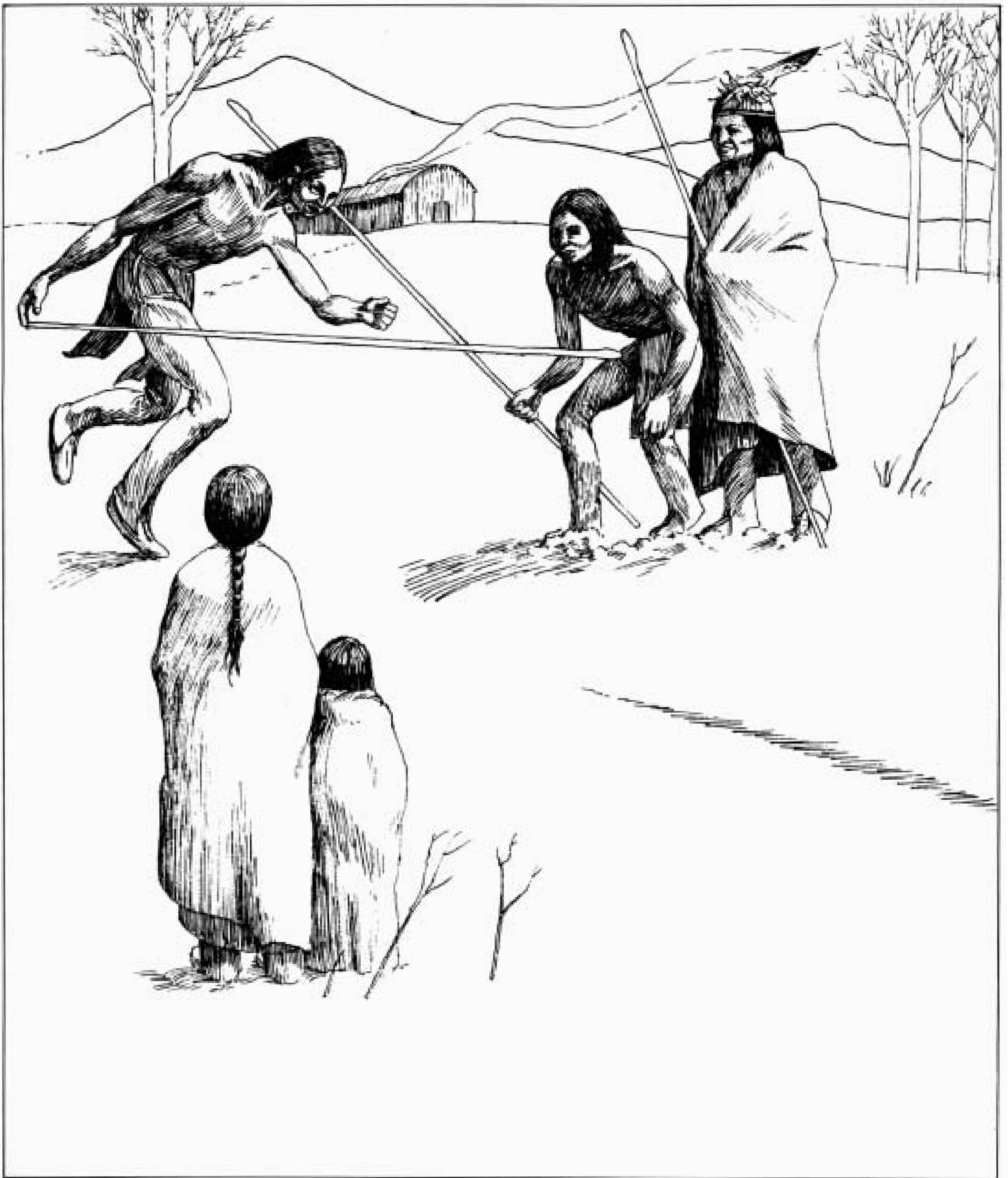
About the Author:
Nadine N. Jennings is a member of the Liberal Arts faculty at Mater Dei College.

Can Anyone Help?

To continue in 1988 the series "Profiles of North Country Women" which appeared in local newspapers and on radio stations during National Women's History Month in March 1987, the St. Lawrence County Branch of the American Association of University Women seeks information about North Country women who made significant contributions to their communities. The 1987 series featured Rhoda Fox Graves, Eliza Kellas, Sarah Raymond Koch, Julia Crane and Marietta Holley. Suggestions of women to be featured in the 1988 series will be gratefully received by K. Briggs at 265-8513 or at 11 Bradley Drive, Potsdam, N.Y. 13676.

Can Anyone Help?

Solomon Barrett, Jr., of Madrid, N.Y., was an important nineteenth century grammarian, born about 1800. Can anyone provide information on this man or his family? If so, please contact Robert Ian Scott, Department of English, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada, S7N OWO.



Snow Snakes

Snow Snakes is a traditional Iroquoian game of skill in which the "snake" is thrown to slide very rapidly in a groove in the snow. (Drawing by John Kahionhes Fadden, reprinted by permission of John Kahionhes Fadden and Strawberry Press, *Visions In Ink*, 1983)

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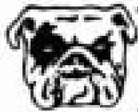

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