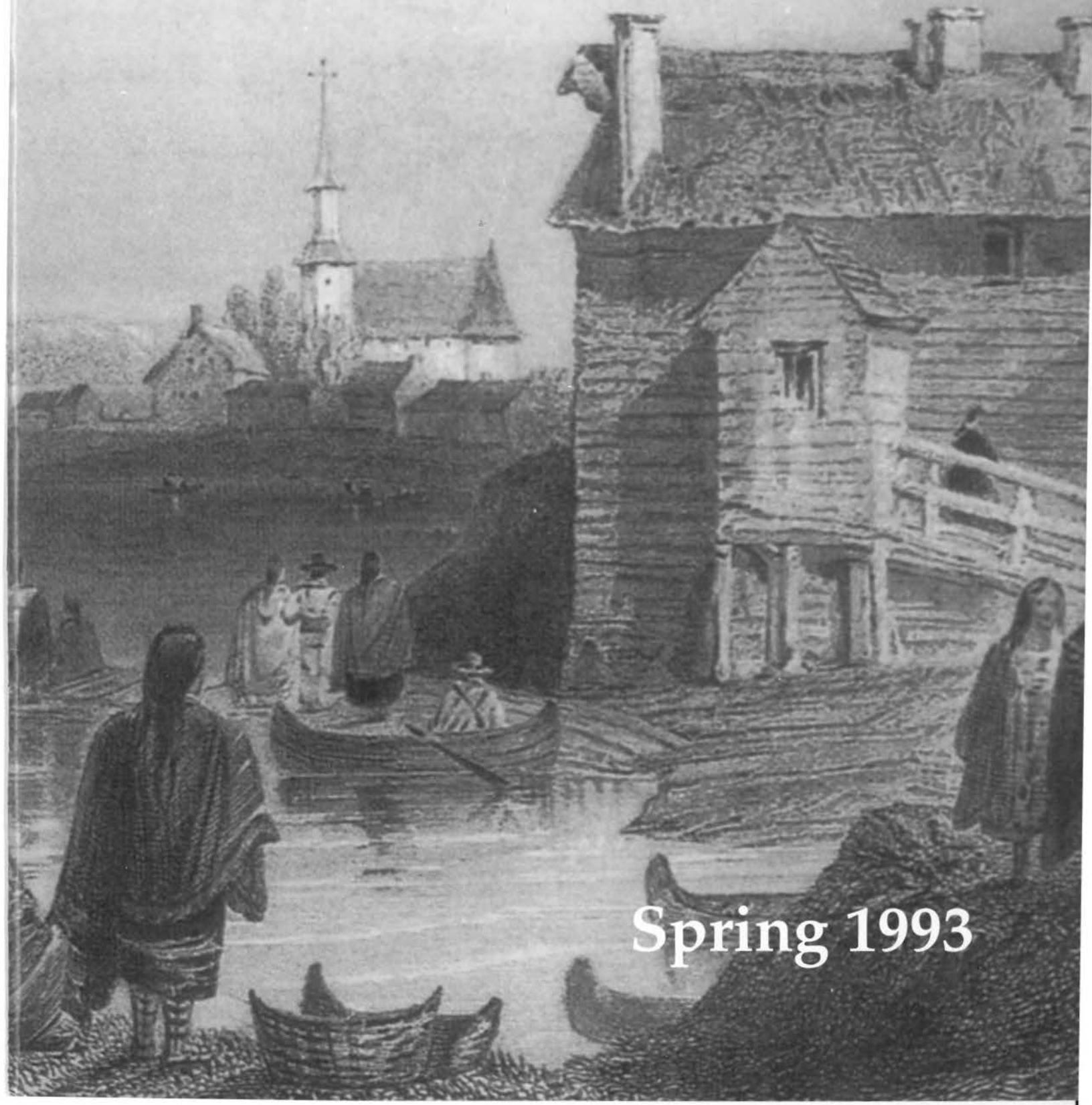


The St. Lawrence County Historical Association

QUARTERLY



Spring 1993

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association
QUARTERLY

Volume XXXVIII
Spring 1993
No. 2

This publication is made possible in part with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts

Editor: Cornel Reinhart

Production Editor: Mark R. Petersen

ISSN: 0558-1931

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1993

The Quarterly is published Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall each year by the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.

Extra copies may be obtained from the St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617, at \$3.00 each plus 75¢ for postage and handling.

Contributions: *The Quarterly* welcomes contributions in the form of manuscripts, drawings, and photographs. If documentation is necessary, we request that it conform to the *MLA Style Manual*. A summary of the *MLA* format is available from the editor. Please address all editorial communications to The Editor, *The Quarterly*, St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617.

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*Cover: W.H. Bartlett and H. Griffiths. St. Regis, Indian Village
(Courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum and Madelaine Gray)*

*The Winter and Spring, 1993, issues
of The Quarterly are devoted to Native
American history in St. Lawrence County.*

A Paradise Lost: The Decline of Autonomy Amongst the Mohawks at Akwesasne

by Jacqueline Goodman-Draper

Prior to contact with Whites, Mohawk Indians were primarily an agricultural people—growing corn, beans and squash—as well as hunting and fishing. There was an abundance of such foods in the seventeenth century Mohawk Valley according to the journals of the Dutch Reverend Johannes Megapolensis.

Upon meeting the Mohawks for the first time he described their lands as a seeming paradise:

The land is good and fruitful in everything which supplies human needs . . . The forests grow chestnuts, plums, hazelnuts and walnuts . . . The ground is covered with bushes of bilberries (blueberries), strawberries . . . grapevines . . . In the forests plenty of

deer . . . also many turkeys . . . partridges, hens and pigeons that fly together in the thousands. Also swans, ducks, geese . . . lions, bears, wolves, foxes and many snakes. In this river is a great plenty of fish. (Megapolensis 1644: 168).

Another Dutchman, Arendt Van Curler, employed by the Dutch West India Company trading with the Mohawks wrote similarly:

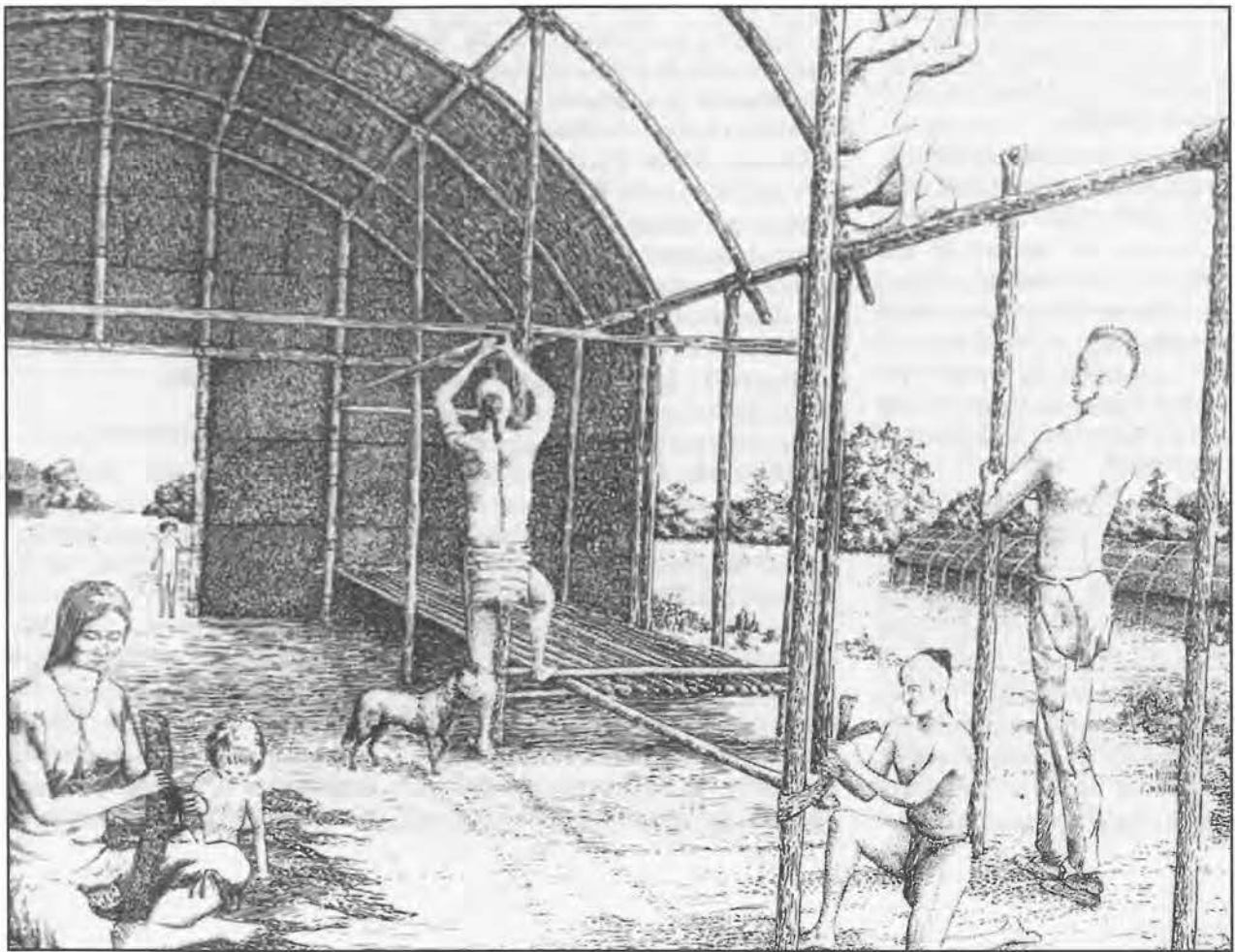


Fig. 1: Construction of a Longhouse. (Drawing Courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

The houses were full of corn . . . we call maize; yes, in some houses more than 300 bushels . . . we ate heartily of pumpkins, beans and venison . . . so we were not hungry but were treated as well as possible on their land (Jamesson 1909: 141).

The traditional way of life during this period was collectivist. Goods were stored in longhouses (similar in appearance to quonset huts covered with bark) and shared amongst several clan-linked families that lived in each longhouse. Perhaps as many as eight fireplaces burned at any given time within a longhouse (Frisch 1970: 34). These families shared food from hunting and fishing. Corn and bearhead soup and other vegetable goods, both fresh and stored were also shared. Everyone contributed to the process of producing these goods. The household, as the basic social and economic unit was collectivist: all work was performed for the household rather than for each individual's benefit.

According to one seventeenth century European observer, women were more impressive than men in their contributions to the household and community. "The women are obliged to prepare the land, to mow, to plant and do everything . . . the men do nothing;" Megapolensis writes, "except hunting, fishing and going to war against their enemies." (Megapolensis 1644: 154-55)

Recent feminist analyses (Reiter 1975, Stacey 1991, Leacock 1980), suggests that when a woman's contribution to society is "public," within the visible world of politics and economics, it garners her respect and position in the community. In contrast, when a woman's contribution is hidden in the private, domestic realm, their recognition by the larger society is minimal. Speaking of communal

property owning groups (like the Mohawk), Engels wrote: "the administration of the household, entrusted to women, was just as much a public, socially necessary industry as the providing of food by the men." (Quoted in K. Sacks 1975: Reiter).

Mohawk women, thus, engaged in the "public" act of providing food (entire cultivation of the fields), and exercised considerable power in the economic and political life of the Mohawks. Descent was recognized through the female line only and clan mothers determined the selection of Mohawk political leaders. Such traditions of female political decision-making, egalitarianism and collective life began to erode, however, with the introduction of the fur trade and Christianity.

The Fur Trade

Mohawk participation in the fur trade as well as their introduction to Christianity contributed to the dissolution of their traditional, collectivist way of life. Europeans wanted furs and Mohawks knew where and how to get them. In exchange they were given new and more effective tools and weapons, cloth that did not require tanning and foods which could be more readily stored and transported. In addition, they were given alcohol which often made them more vulnerable to manipulation (Fadden 1947: 9). The Dutch initially controlled the Hudson River trade, then the French and British companies competed for monopoly of the fur trade along the St. Lawrence River. This commerce demanded a constant flow of furs. For many, fur trapping displaced other traditional forms of subsistence since they didn't pursue both endeavors simultaneously. When the fur bearing animals in their immediate area became scarce,

the Mohawks, along with the rest of the Iroquois, became middlemen in the fur trade between the Northwest Native Americans and the Europeans (Goldstein 1969: 47).

What is most significant in their participation in this fur trade is the way in which, aside from engendering wars among different Native American tribes for control (against the Hurons and Algonquins among others) it necessitated the break up of the collective household (Leacock 1981). According to Leacock, tending a fur trapline was more individualist than hunting, fishing or agricultural pursuits. This in turn, affected the family units, breaking them into smaller entities, (approaching the "nuclear family") and detracting from the longhouse collective (Leacock 1981: 37). The fur trade also necessitated trapping for the purpose of exchange, not use. Thus, the process of trapping began to undermine the collective contribution of each individual to the household's needs. Individual nuclear families might now reap the private gains of the fur trade rather than the household as a whole. Hence, Mohawk involvement in the fur trade, as with other Native Americans, led to the onset of private property, individualism, and destruction of collectivism.

Effects of Christianity

Christianity was another major factor that led to the undermining of collectivism and to the underdevelopment of Mohawk culture. Mohawks, along with many other Native Americans in the seventeenth century, were used by both the French and English in their struggle for control over North America. The French, for example, granted exclusive trade monopolies to private companies in North America on the condition that

they transform the people there through religious activity, and render them subservient to colonial rule. The French also used Catholic Jesuits for these purposes. In addition, they used the Jesuits for military purposes: to infiltrate Indian communities and convert the peoples to Catholicism; simultaneously gaining access to important military posts through the Jesuit colonies, and Native armed forces, while creating a more malleable, converted population.

The "political advantage" for the French was of course to have allies on the doorstep of the English colonies. (Frisch 1970: 46) One group of Mohawks settled at the Jesuit Mission of Caughnawaga where they were pressed into French military service, raiding New England, allying themselves with the French against the Senecas. Another strategic military post was established by the French in 1755 at St. Regis, now known as Akwesasne. The English attempted similar military strategies with their priests.

Christian outposts were used as military stations but also as dispensers of a distinct colonial ideology geared toward "civilizing" the Native American: resocializing them, and transforming them into settled farmers of New France. Such imported values included individualism, male dominance and political hierarchy. The European strategies for attaining such transformations involved taking the children away from their parents; haranguing men to be masters of "their" women and instilling ideas concerning the moral superiority of monogamy as the only honorable state of matrimony.

Ethnographic evidence of such strategies can be found in the Jesuit Relations, seventeenth century Jesuit

chronicles of their experiences at French missions with North American Native Americans. Leacock and Goodman (1976) used such evidence to examine French Jesuit Paul Le Jeune's efforts to transform the Montagnais Naskapi Natives of the upper St. Lawrence River. While the Montagnais were hunters and the Mohawks primarily agricultural, it does not require much imagination to assume that similar historical processes were utilized by French missionaries in their "work" with other natives.

Discussing the necessity of stealing native children from their parents to another locale in order to resocialize them, Jesuit Paul Le Jeune writes:

The reason why I would not like to take the children of one locality in that locality itself, but rather in some other place, is because the Barbarians cannot bear to have their children punished, even scolded . . . they take this to such an extent that upon the slightest pretext they would take them away from us before they were educated (Leacock and Goodman 1976)

Le Jeune proselytized against the freedom of serial monogamy that both women and men took for granted among the Montagnais. He wrote:

Since I have been preaching among them that a man should not have more than one wife, I have not been well received by the women; for since they are more numerous than the men . . . the others would have to suffer. . . I told a man that it was not honorable for a woman to love any one else except her husband. He replied, "Thou hast no sense. You French people love only your own children but we all love all the children of our tribe (Leacock and Goodman 1976).

The seventeenth century Dutch Reverend, Johannes Megapolensis,

similarly observed the Mohawks, "generally live without marriage; and if any of them have wives, the marriage continues no longer than seems good to one of the other parties- and then they separate, and each takes another partner . . . (Megapolensis 1644: 172).

Le Jeune also reproached the Montagnais on their lack of hierarchical political structure. He was dismayed that their chiefs held such positions based on their great oratory skills, not because of their presumed superiority over others. Hence, the missionaries tried to instill deference amongst the people to their "leaders":

They imagine that they ought by right of birth to enjoy the liberty of wild ass colts, rendering homage to anyone whomsoever, except when they like. They have reproached me a hundred times because we fear our Captains, while they laugh at and make sport of theirs. All the authority of their Chief is in his tongue's end; for he is powerful only so far as he is eloquent; and even if he kills himself talking . . . he will not be obeyed unless he pleases the Savages (Leacock and Goodman 1976).

The Mohawks were similarly known as great orators and opposed the concentration of military or political power and authority in a single individual or group of individuals. Instead, their tendency was to divide authority among a number of equals (Goldstein 1969: 38). The greatest orators were often the spokespersons for the group. This ethnographic evidence points to the specific processes used and chronicled by the Jesuits in their attempts to "salvage" the Montagnais and Mohawks from "paganism". In this process, they were "underdeveloping" the collectivist, egalitarian, Native culture.

Coercion of European Values

Native adoption of European values was not a smooth process. Responses ranged from zealous dedication, to indifference, to tremendous hostility. Many Iroquois tried to prevent their kin's conversion to Christianity. French missionaries viewed it somewhat differently as French Jesuit Shea describes the new convert as a fragile believer who must be protected from their pagan relatives:

The Indian convert . . . was often lost by the bad example and corrupting influence of his pagan countrymen, already depraved by connection with the whites and maddened by the liquor supplied by the New York traders. Often . . . converts were subject to persecution from their own kindred (Shea 1855: 296).

How does one explain *any* adherence to Christian values, let alone that of entire groups of Native Americans, such as the Caughnawaga Mohawks who left the Mohawk Valley to follow Jesuits into Canada and similarly, the spinoff group who settled at St. Regis? As Carse writes, "it was the point at which the Mohawks became involved in the politics and economy of the colonial frontier that there was a split among Mohawks, some being induced to participate in the French missions of Canada and others remaining in the Mohawk valley (Carse, 1949: 10 quoted in Frisch: 45).

Leacock similarly argues that Native acceptance of European religious values must be linked to their involvement in the fur trade. That is, once embroiled in this trade, Natives became dependent on European resources. She suggests the Jesuits and their teachings arrived in New France a full century after the economic basis for unquestioned cooperation, reciprocity and respect for individual

autonomy began to be undercut by the trading of furs for European goods. On the basis of new economic ties, some Montagnais Naskapi were interested in attaching themselves to the mission station and the new European settlement, thereby availing themselves of the resources these offered (Leacock 1980: 58).

Leacock also argues that epidemic disease (in particular small pox), brought by the Europeans, along with alcohol, brought by the fur traders, undermined Native American self-confidence and, to that extent, rendered them more susceptible to Catholicism.

Many Caughnawaga Mohawks, however, despite their adherence to Catholicism, and French alliance still engaged in "illicit trade" between Albany and Montreal with their non-Catholic, Native brethren, (allied to the English). This illustrates that adherence to European values and European countries were not strong enough to break Iroquois links to each other. Clearly the process of "underdeveloping" a people, (transforming their values, undermining their means of subsistence, and creating dependence) is never straight forward. There is simultaneous resistance, partial acceptance and residual ties with traditional values and family.

McIlwain indicates this in reference to the Catholic Caughnawaga Mohawks who maintained their ties with other non-Catholic Iroquois:

The intermediaries in this illicit traffic were the Caughnawag . . . under French influence. The relations of these Indians with their brethren who remained allies of the English were never entirely broken off [however] in peace or war . . . (McIlwain 1915: xlvi-xlix quoted in Frisch: 57).

By 1744, Britain and France declared war against one another. Those Mohawks allied and trading

with the English, took up war against the French (Jennings Francis 1986: 53). In the meantime, however, at least one half of the Mohawks, the Caughnawagas, had left their homelands 75 years earlier, following French Jesuits to New France (New Canada), many of whom ended up in Caughnawaga (Frisch 197: 50). The English governor of New York, Colonel Dongan, tried to lure these Mohawks back to New York in an attempt to alienate them from the French (Fadden 1947: 11), even though they had been denounced by the Iroquois Confederacy. The French, however, had already coerced the Caughnawagas into military service and the latter, while maintaining trade with non-Catholic Mohawks, carried out many raids in New England for the French cause. By the late seventeenth century, the Iroquois gained control of the highly profitable fur trade by continuing their trade with the English, angering the French. The Iroquois had already established trading ties with Western tribes since their fur territory was depleted and the English still desired more furs. In 1755, French Jesuits from Caughnawaga established the St Regis settlement. As one might imagine, St. Regis was founded as both an outpost of Catholicism and, as another strategic military post (Frisch 1970: 58). The official political alliance of St. Regis was with the French, given that the outbreak of the French and Indian War occurred simultaneously with the founding of this settlement (Frisch 1970: 57).

Nevertheless, as Britain gained more territory near Montreal, several individuals from St. Regis joined the British cause. During the next round of hostilities, this time between Britain and the American colonies in the Revolutionary War of 1776, the St. Regis Indians ostensibly chose to

remain neutral (Seaver 1918: 580 quoted in Frisch: 69). Other historians, however, dispute this finding, some claiming that the St. Regis Mohawks sided with the British (Hough 1853: 122), while others say they sided with the Americans (Fadden 1947: 15).

Loss of Lands

The significance lies not so much with whom the St. Regis Mohawks sided in these Euro-American conflicts, but the ways in which the conflicts contributed to further "underdevelopment" of the Native Americans. One old Mohawk chief who wanted to remain neutral in the

Revolutionary War, a conflict between whites, stated:

once again the white men are fighting among themselves. They are fighting over the lands that they took from us. Why should we take sides in their fights? Long ago they encouraged us to go to war against our own people. Did they come to help us? They gave us weapons and encouraged our tribes to destroy each other. When we had become weak and our country was soaked with the blood of our people, they came and occupied them. Let the white men alone. Let them destroy each other. Perhaps when they have killed each other off, when they have gone, the forests, mountains, lakes and rivers which the Great Spirit had

given to our fathers, will return to us (Fadden, Ray 1947: 15).

Following the American Revolution, the Iroquois lost over 95% of their lands (Hauptman 1988: 5). There was a continual tug of war between state and federal jurisdiction over Indian affairs, because New York State wanted access to Indian lands. As early as 1783 the state legislature attempted to expropriate Iroquois lands for military bounty. Despite federal guarantees protecting Iroquois lands, (the Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1784), the New York Legislature passed two laws, in 1784 and 1785, that facilitated the distribution of any "unappropriated lands" as they saw

St. Lawrence County Historical Sketch: Restrictions on Mohawk Activity at St. Regis Before the War of 1812

Excerpted from Franklin B. Hough's History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties, New York (1853)

On the approach of the war [of 1812], the situation of St. Regis, on the national boundary, placed these people [the Mohawks] in a peculiar and delicate position. Up to this period, although residing in both governments, they had been as one, and in their internal affairs, were governed by twelve chiefs, who were elected by the tribe, and held their offices for life.

The annuities and presents of both governments were equally divided among them, and in the cultivation of their lands, and the division of the rents and profits arising from leases, they knew no distinction of party.

The war operated with peculiar severity against them, from the terror of Indian massacre, which the recollections and traditions of former wars, had generally inspired the inhabitants.

So great was the terror which these poor people excited, that they could not travel, even where acquainted, without procuring a pass, which they were accustomed to obtain from any of the principal inhabitants, whose names were publically known. A paper, stating that the bearer was a quiet and peaceable Indian, with or without a signature, they were accustomed to solicit, and this they would hold up in sight, when still at a distance, that those who might meet them should not be alarmed. They were likewise accustomed to require persons traveling across their reservation, to have, if strangers, a pass, purporting the peaceable nature of their business. The chiefs, it is said, appointed certain persons to grant these passes, among whom was Captain Polley, of Massena Springs. As few of them could read, it became necessary to agree upon some emblem by which the signification could be known, and the following device was adopted: If a person were going through to French Mills, a bow was drawn on the paper, but if its bearer was designing to visit St. Regis village, an arrow was added [i.e., the bow was drawn as if it were strung with an arrow] . . .

Thus cut off from their usual means of subsistence, they were reduced to a wretched extremity . . .

fit: "in such a manner as they should judge most conducive to the interests of the public" (State of New York 1889: 10 quoted in Frisch 1970: 71; Hauptman 1988: 7). And, as Frisch points out, the "public" did not include the St. Regis Indians. Rather, the lands between Lake Champlain and the St. Lawrence River were appropriated by the State as bonuses for veterans (non-Native apparently) of the Revolutionary War (Frisch: 71).

The St. Regis Mohawks contested this claim along with the six mile square tract of land that was "reserved" for them by Alexander Macomb, a fur trader from Detroit, who purchased the surrounding 3,840,000 acres of land in northern New York from the state. Disputes ensued between the State of New York and the Seven Nations of Canada as to the veracity of the Native American land claims. The Mohawks sought title to 800,000 acres of land within the State whereas the State claimed that this title had been sold to Colonel John Livingston, an Englishman, by the Seven Nations (Hough 1853: 143). By 1796, a treaty was signed and the St. Regis Indians allegedly ceded to the State all the land except two parcels one of 6 square miles on the Grasse River, and the other, of two square miles on the Salmon River. They also are said to have received a lump sum of 3200 dollars plus annuities of 535 dollars to be shared with the Caughnawagas (Frisch 1970: 71).

Aspects of the collective way of life still persisted among the Mohawks of Akwesasne at this time. The annuities were shared by all members of the St. Regis community, the lands were cultivated in common and internal tribal affairs were still guided by the traditional political organization of 12 life chiefs, selected by the clan mothers of

the four major clans: the wolf, the bear, the turtle, and the snipe (Frisch: 77-78). This continued despite the missionary presence at St. Regis.

Nevertheless, the march toward underdevelopment at St. Regis continued, especially during the War of 1812 when most Mohawks sided with the Americans (Fadden 1947: 15). Once again, St. Regis became a military station, this time with the British posted there. They were unable to pursue their traditional means of subsistence, due to their confinement to the reservation. Quickly thereafter, the Mohawks of St. Regis were prevented from travelling. Hunting elk, caribou and deer was curtailed. A system not unlike apartheid in South Africa was established. To come and go, Mohawks were required to hold passes stating they were "good Indians." "They could not travel, even where acquainted, without procuring a pass," Hough writes, "[a] paper, stating that the bearer was a quiet and peaceable Indian..." (Hough 1853: 155).

Such processes exemplify the creation of Mohawk dependence on the State. Their means of independence was systematically undermined. Just as the fur trade created a Native dependence on European trade goods, the War of 1812 prevented the St. Regis Mohawks from procuring their own means of subsistence, and the Indians were forced to ask for supplies from both the American and British governments. They received food and blankets, shoes and tobacco, much of which found its way over to the British in Canada due to the fact that British were stationed at St. Regis during the war. The termination of this war in 1817 led to the division of the St. Regis reserve into a Canadian and American side; the reserve strad-

dles the international border delineated at war's end. The combination of the new "reserve" that was created, the loss of lands and resources led to the further underdevelopment of St. Regis Mohawks. Their lack of freedom of movement about the land, their limited agricultural and hunting resources led to greater dependence on Euro-Americans for those goods they were no longer able to attain themselves.

The Creation of Colonial Tribal Governments

Just as the Jesuits attempted to transform Native political organization to match French tradition in the seventeenth century, Americans of the nineteenth century wanted Native leaders, hierarchical organization, and men to make political decisions. Whereas previously, Mohawk chiefs were appointed for life terms by the clan mothers, the New York State legislature appointed three males to act as trustees for the Mohawks. These trustees were chosen according to American values about age and gender.

Every year thereafter" writes Hough, they would "hold a town meeting on their said reservation, within the state, and, by a majority of male Indians above 21 years of age . . . choose a clerk. . . . to make such rules, orders and regulations. (Hough 1853: 154 quoted in Frisch 1970: 77).

On the Canadian side of the reserve, tremendous resistance appeared to the enforcement of elected chiefs over the traditional method of appointment. In 1884 the Canadian Parliament passed an Indian Advancement Act stating that the "more advanced bands of Indians of Canada" could elect chiefs" with a view to training them for the exercise of municipal

powers." The St. Regis Indian Agent from the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs was responsible for carrying out these elections at St. Regis. But, in 1890, the people of Akwesasne let him know of their fierce opposition:

The Indian Act only breeds sorrow, contention, hatred, disrespect of family ties, spite against one another, and absence of unity among us Indians. It also creates two distinct parties at the elections. . . . There is only one way to recover brotherly feelings, that of substituting the seven lords appointed by each of the seven totems according to the ancient customs which we know gave us peace, prosperity, friendship and brotherly feelings in every cause. . . . (Rarihokwats, Akwesasne Notes 1974: 6-7).

Over a thousand Iroquois from Akwesasne, and neighboring Mohawk reserves at Oka and Caughnawaga signed the above petition. Nevertheless, according to the Indian Act, the election was still to be held in 1898. Once again, there was strong resistance to the election among the Mohawks. This time the Clan Mothers of St. Regis objected to the Governor General's plan in Canada:

We have considered the elective system as not being intended for us Indians, and we would therefore return to our old method of selecting our life chiefs, according to our constitution Iroquois Government. As Your Excellency must know, the ancient custom of creating chiefs is that they are selected according to the different clans, there being three from each clan, and also three women who select her special chief from among her clan. . . . As there is four distinct clans, there is twelve life chiefs who hold their offices for life.

If any misdemeanor shall offend their clans, these women first hold

council with the women of their own clan, and if they find his offense of sufficient strength to warrant his resignation, these women will call upon the men members of their clan and . . . select another member to represent them. The women councilors each watches over her special charge and informs them of the rules of their chieftainship (Akwesasne Notes 1974: 7).

The Canadian Department of Indian Affairs ignored the Clan Mothers' petition, as well as their choice of traditional chiefs, and called an election anyway. In addition, they withheld treaty payments until elected chiefs were installed. Violence ensued, an Akwesasne man was killed but, the Canadian government finally got its way with a small group of Mohawk supporters and elected chiefs were put in place.

The traditional woman's role in choosing chiefs was deemed unacceptable by those in the New York State legislature who were "negotiating" with the Mohawks, and by the Canadian government. Nevertheless, as the Canadian case illustrates, such impositions on traditional values and political structures die hard, met by stiff Mohawk resistance.

Other Canadian attempts to diminish further the role of women occurred with the passage of the Indian Act in 1868, which defined Indian status by one's father or husband, not by the traditional matrilineal method of defining one's family: by one's mother. Hence, a Mohawk woman who married a non-native man was no longer considered an Indian herself under Canadian law.

Summary

This paper delineates the central historical processes that contributed to the demise of Awkesasne Mohawk

autonomy in their economic, political and cultural lives. Native adherence to Euro-Christian values however, never occurred without strenuous Native resistance and struggle, a struggle that continues to this day. The processes delineated here indicate that as the Mohawks' traditional economy was undermined, and as their resources were lost through broken treaties and outright theft, their vulnerability to political and cultural destruction became all the greater. The result was the beginning of paradise lost: the decline of Mohawk political, social and economic autonomy.

Endnotes

*This paper is a portion of a larger collaborative project with Peter J. Herne, a resident of Akwesasne, and one of my very talented undergraduate students at Potsdam College. This project is being funded by the Potsdam College Research and Creative Endeavors Program; the Potsdam College Faculty and Undergraduate Grants; and the State University of New York Nuala McGann Drescher Grant.

*The Mohawks occupied the territory which was at Schoharie Creek in the east, went to Schenectady in the south and nearly to Oneonta in the 1600s (Frisch 1970: 23).

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Edward Everett, Potsdam Legislator: Author of the Suppressed “Everett Report”

by Robert B. Shaw



Fig. 1: Map of the Frontiers of the Northern Colonies in 1768. Detail
(Photo Courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association)

This story chiefly concerns claims of the Iroquois Indian Confederation to very extensive portions of New York State. This highly controversial issue, which alarmed many governmental units and thousands of individual landowners and rendered uncertain land titles that were thought to have been beyond challenge for nearly two centuries, created enormous confusion and gave rise to prolonged litigation

during the 1970s. What has not been realized is that Edward A. Everett, a Potsdam lawyer, business promoter and one time state assemblyman, anticipated this issue and rendered a formal opinion on it, 50 years earlier. But at that time the Indian land claims question was of such little public interest and Everett's opinion so far out, that his legislative report attracted minimal attention, stimulated no debate and, in a literal sense, was lost. But still, his authorship of so

ridiculous a proposal—as it was then viewed—caused his defeat in the next Republican primary for his legislative seat and cut short what might have been, recognizing his undoubted talents, a brilliant political career.

Edward A. Everett was born on a Lawrence farm, on September 18, 1860, of a long line of old New England forebears.¹ He was educated at the Lawrenceville Academy, Potsdam Normal School and Albany Law School, and admitted to the bar

in 1888. Initially he practiced in Potsdam, under the tutelage of William A. Dart until his death, and then continued alone or in partnership with others. Everett also found time to play an active role in a surprising number of local business ventures; from 1894 to 1897 he was manager and treasurer of the High Falls Sulphite Pulp and Mining Company at Pyrites, and again associated with that enterprise in 1900-04. Later he served as president of the Rossie Electric & Manufacturing Co., besides controlling the water power rights at Nicholville. Mr. Everett was also involved with the H. D. Thatcher & Co. baking powder and dairy supplies business for some years after 1904, when he helped to reorganize that firm, held the office of president and perhaps lost some of his own money in the faltering venture.² In 1909, he was made President of the Fulton Vise & Machine Co. of Lowville.

More pertinent to the present story was Mr. Everett's election to the New York State Assembly in 1915 and service there until 1922. Everett was active on several committees, chairman of two (Conservation and Judiciary) and an early supporter of the conservation movement, during a time when scant attention was paid to that cause.

In 1919 the New York State legislature established an "Indian Commission," with 13 designated members. After several others had declined the post of chairman, probably viewing this function as a political dead end, Everett accepted the responsibility. At this time, Indian affairs were unimportant in this state; there was no awareness of an "Indian problem" or consciousness of past injustices. The main objective of such committees, both on a national and state level, was to promote the "allotment," policy, the distribution of reservation lands

to Indians on an individual basis and the complete abolition of tribal governments.

By the first Treaty of Fort Stanwix between the then British colonial authorities and the Iroquois Federation in 1768, the tribes, particularly the Mohawks, were deprived of some of their eastern most territory, along the Mohawk River, but a line running from Fort Stanwix (Rome) down the Unadilla River, thence down the Susquehanna into Pennsylvania, thence up the western branch of the Susquehanna and over the mountains to Pittsburgh, and then following the Ohio River, was clearly recognized as the eastern and southern boundaries of the Indian Confederacy. This treaty designated nearly one-half of New York province and about a quarter of Pennsylvania as Iroquois territory. Their possession of this vast tract was later reconfirmed by a treaty (second Treaty of Fort Stanwix) in 1784 between the Indian tribes and the infant United States, then being governed under the Articles of Confederation.

Notwithstanding this recognition of sovereignty by the federal government, New York state and many private traders, under the impetus of steady westward pressure on the part of white settlers, were constantly soliciting the several Iroquois tribes to sell their lands. Sale of the land in the western part of the state was delayed by a jurisdictional dispute between Massachusetts and New York, tracing back to a conflict in colonial charters. King Charles I's charter of 1629 to the Massachusetts Company granted substantial territory to the Bay Colony which overlapped the grant by his son, Charles II, to the latter's brother, the Duke of York, in 1664. In early American history this territory was a wilderness, but after the Revolution its ownership and jurisdiction re-

quired final determination. The dispute was settled without too much ado, however, by an agreement of 1786—the Hartford Convention—conveying to Massachusetts the ownership of the soil in the land west of Seneca Lake, but reserving to New York State the political jurisdiction. The Massachusetts title to this land was not absolute, but rather was defined as a right of pre-emption only, i.e., the first and exclusive right to buy the land from the Indians. The eastern boundary of the Massachusetts award is generally identified on old maps as the "Pre-emption Line." Substantially all of the land where the pre-emptive right was thus conveyed to Massachusetts corresponded closely with territory then in the possession of the Seneca tribe.

Meanwhile, efforts by land companies and speculators, in alliance with politicians, to acquire these Indian lands were unceasing. According to many accounts, such efforts were frequently accompanied by fraud and trickery. Induced by immediate cash payments, or promised annual pensions, the several Iroquois tribes gradually yielded the great bulk of their territory, for surprisingly modest amounts. East of the Pre-emption Line the land was sold to New York State (or, often, through the state acting only as a dummy to private parties). West of the line Massachusetts conveyed its pre-emption rights, in a few large tracts, to private land companies. By the early 1800s the Indians had been dispossessed of all land in New York State where as recently as 1784 they had held clear title to about 17,000 square miles—aside only from a dozen scattered reservations.

In 1790, while these real estate negotiations were in process, the national government passed an act,

that the best solution for the Indians would be for them to become citizens and quickly join the prevailing culture. Other publications, and most politicians, simply met the Everett report with silence. The legislature refused to accept it, and apparently did not trouble to preserve any copy. Subsequently, some bibliographies on Indian affairs have listed it, but all copies had been lost, and only vague memories of what it said survive. The report remained entirely hidden until the late 1950s, when Helen M. Upton, later a professor at Russell Sage College in Troy, elected to focus her master's thesis on Indian education and schools in New York State. Quite by accident, Mrs. Upton discovered that Lulu Stillman, Everett's stenographer in 1920-22, still possessed a copy.⁶ This discovery resulted in an expanded study by Professor Upton and the eventual publication of her book, "The Everett Report in Historical Perspective," in 1980. Ironically, this publication was sponsored by the New York American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, an agency of the state. A by-product of Mrs. Upton's scholarship was the republication and distribution of the long suppressed report.

The release, and then the quick suppression, of this report provoked no violent public reaction. Everett was not tarred and feathered, burned in effigy, or even, as far as a casual biographer can gather, ostracized by any of his friends. But his political career was brought to an immediate end. No one could expect that the man who recommended giving half of the state back to the natives should be returned to the legislature. In the Fall election of 1922 Everett was decisively defeated in the Republican

primary although he still carried his home town of Potsdam by a wide margin. Now 62 years old, he resumed his law practice, held the office of town supervisor, perhaps slipping into semi-retirement. Upon his death, on December 22, 1928, he received lengthy and highly commendatory obituaries in local newspapers, recounting his many public services and making only scant reference to his position on the Indian question. According to early directories, the Everett family lived at various addresses in Potsdam, at 45 Maple Street, then at 57 Elm, later still at 38 Main, and at the time of his death at a farmhouse on the back Hannawa Road. His son, Cyrus, lived at 11 State Street as recently as 1975, when Mrs. Upton attempted in vain to obtain papers or documents that might have been useful in her study.

Everett was, in a sense, a "lost man" in New York State history. He was 50 years ahead of his time in investigating and adopting a position respecting Indian land claims, a subject which remains highly controversial today but which has long since passed the point where it can be casually swept under the table. In a modern setting he would have certainly achieved greater prominence and played a more active role in this issue, although only with the loss of personal popularity and at the expense of those encomiums in his obituaries. In retrospect one believes that Everett deserves considerable respect for persevering in his personal beliefs when they necessarily meant the sacrifice of his political career.⁷

It would be improper, however, to make a major point out of this final activity near the end of Mr. Everett's career. He was certainly an honorable and prominent North Country per-

sonality during the opening decades of this expiring century, and on a simple historical basis he deserves greater recognition for his early role in the Indian land claims controversy. He would perhaps be surprised if he could know that that issue, then of minimal public interest, would explode into a highly important and divisive problem half a century later. In his premature political pronouncement, astounding as it was in 1922, Everett may have been right or wrong, wise or foolish, but this should be enough to justify his rescue from near obscurity.

Notes

¹ See Mrs. McLaughlin's article on "The Everett Farm," in *The Quarterly* for April 1989 for more complete family background.

² See "The Thatcher Story" by Robert Wyant and Victoria Levitt, in *ibid.*, April 1987, p.6.

³ In the more recent actions by Indian tribes to repudiate land sales made since the Nonintercourse Act, the defendant states, counties, cities and landowners have generally offered two defenses: (1) the Nonintercourse Act was never intended to apply to the original states, and (2) the Indian tribes have lost any right of action due to the statute of limitations or the theory of laches. While both of these positions may hold some merit, each of them has been specifically overruled by recent Supreme Court decisions.

⁴ However, Everett did oppose the notion, accepted by many, that the Indians should be exempt from the fishing and game laws. In this case his position as chairman of the Conservation Committee perhaps came into conflict with his general position on the Indian question.

⁵ While the Indians were naturally delighted with Mr. Everett's conclusions, they must have been annoyed by some of his wording, particularly the frequent use of the verb "cede." The territory in question had been in possession of the Iroquois

tribes since long prior to their first contacts with Europeans. This possession, with the boundaries Mr. Everett cited, had been recognized by the previous Treaty of 1768, under the British colonial regime. The Treaty of 1784, in the strict use of language, did not cede any territory; it merely reconfirmed the possession of that territory.

⁶ Later, in 1975, a second copy, uncataloged and unidentified on its spine, was discovered in the federal Department of the Interior.

⁷ Mr. Everett, after his legislative defeat, engaged actively in the solicitation of various Indian tribes and groups to represent them, on a contingency basis, in instituting litigation against the state and other parties, for the recovery of land which had allegedly been taken from them by fraud, a hundred years or more earlier.

⁸ But this is a point of legal ethics that we are just now addressing. Everett turned some of his cases over to a larger, associated law firm in New York City, of

which one of his nephews was a partner. According to his obituary in the St. Lawrence Herald, his final legal action was an unsuccessful lawsuit against Alcoa, in Massena, to recover for the St. Regis Indians the land under the main buildings of their plant.

Robert B. Shaw is a frequent contributor of articles to The Quarterly.

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