

The Seven Nations of Canada: An Alliance and a Treaty

Indian Time, in co-operation with Darrell Thompson welcome our community to follow the series of The Seven Nations of Canada: An Alliance and a Treaty. Indian Time will be publishing a portion weekly for the next three weeks.

On May 31, 1796 a deputation from the Seven Nations of Canada signed a treaty with the United States of America, ceding all Mohawk claims to lands within the State of New York, excepting a six square mile tract at Akwesasne, a square mile on the Salmon River, a square mile on the Grass River, and a meadow along the Grass River. The "Seven Nations" also received payments of 1,230 pounds 6 s. 8d., plus an annuity of 213 pounds 6 s. 8d. This payment and annuity were to be shared by the Akwesasne and Kahnawake settlements.

The Seven Nations Treaty continues to provide a source of conflict and misunderstanding within the Mohawk settlements of Kahnawake and Akwesasne and between the Mohawk Nation and the State of New York. The most dramatic manifestation of this conflict was the 1974 reoccupation of some Adirondack land by a group of Mohawk from Kahnawake, Akwesasne, Deseronto and Kanasatake. This occupation resulted in a confrontation between the Mohawk and authorities from New York State and eventually in the establishment of the Ganienkeh settlement near Plattsburgh, New York (Akwesasne Notes 1975:17; 1976:32).

The issue that remains at the heart of these misunderstandings is the legality and applicability of the Seven Nations of Canada Treaty to the Mohawk. In order to clarify the terms of this question, it is first necessary to identify the

"Seven Nations of Canada" and to provide some cultural and historic context for understanding demands: (1) identifying the bounds of Mohawk territory; (2) locating the Mohawk settlements within this territory and defining their relationship to each other from the time of contact until the mid-nineteenth century; (3) examining the general Iroquois tendency towards expansion and alliance with "satellite nations" [sic] and (4) examining the details of the Seven Nations Treaty in light of these cultural and historic details.

THE TERRITORY OF KANIENKEH

The Mohawk refer to themselves as the *Kanienkehaka*, "The People of the Flint," and their national territory as *Kanienkeh*, "The Land of the Flint." The Mohawk share a western border with the Oneida, co-members of the Iroquois League. Kanienkeh is bounded by the Mohawk Valley on the south, on the east by the Hudson River, Lake Champlain and the Green Mountains, and on the north by the St. Lawrence River. The principal areas of settlement and occupation for the Mohawk were the St. Lawrence Valley in the north and the Mohawk Valley to the south. There is some evidence that the Mohawk made seasonal trips over the Berkshires to fish for salmon in the Connecticut River Valley, but it is doubtful that they ever occupied this land year round (Day 1965; Huden 1957). The central Adirondack region was called *Kaughsaratake* and identified on early maps as "the beaver hunting territory of the Confederate Indians." This interpretation is supported by other documentary evidence (Long 1791:6; Williams 1859:20.37).

The Mohawk were surrounded on three sides by hostile neighbors. These

included the Mahican to the southeast, the Abinaki to the northeast, the Montagnais to the north (all Algonquin speakers) and the Iroquoian-speaking Huron to the northwest. Later, in historic times, the Mohawk had the French at Montreal and the Dutch and English at Albany for neighbors. According to Mohawk tradition when they were not at war with their tribal neighbors, the Mohawk traded at Kawenote Tiontiakwe, the "Place Where the People Divide," the site of the Island of Montreal. At Kawenote Tiontiakwe the Mohawk exchanged corn for venison, furs and the superior, Algonquin birch bark canoes. At the time of Cartier's exploration of the St. Lawrence River the Mohawk were at peace with their neighbors. However, by the time of Champlain's incursions (1607-1609) the Mohawk were at war with their Algonquin neighbors. When Champlain lent support to the Algonquin in this conflict, he forced an extended retreat of the Mohawk into the Mohawk Valley. The territory of Kanienkeh, however, remained in control of the Mohawk who opposed White settlement either by the French or the English until the nineteenth century.

MOHAWK SETTLEMENTS IN THE HISTORIC PERIOD

For a detailed discussion of Mohawk settlement sites in the historic period see Thomas Grassman (1952) and William Fenton and Elizabeth Tooker (1978). After their retreat south at the opening of the seventeenth century the Mohawk occupied three principal village sites and several smaller ones (Fenton and Tooker 1978:466) located on the southern shore of the Mohawk River. The Mohawk often moved their village sites and at

times gave the new village a new name. The first village of the early historic period (1607-1666) was called Onekagoneka (Jameson 1909:142), Asserue (ibid.:178), or Ossemenon (JR 29:51) by Joques. By 1659 this village had moved and was called Kahnawake (NYCD 13:112). The second village was called Kanagaro and, according to Fenton and Tooker, remained unchanged (1978:467). The largest Mohawk village during this period was known as Tionnontoguen.

All three Mohawk villages were burned to the ground in 1666 by Marquis de Tracy's expedition against the Mohawk. When a tentative peace was established between the Mohawk and the French the following year, the Mohawk were able to resettle parts of their, northern territory, settling first at Kentake (1667-1676) and later at Kahnawake. Some of the Kentake Mohawk moved from Kentake to Mount Royal, then to Sault au Recollet in 1696. This community moved yet again to Kanasatake, or the mission of Lake of Two Mountains, in 1721. The process of northern expansion was continued with the formation of a village at the head of Lake St. Francis and its junction with the River Louis (NYCD 10:105). In 1755 this village moved further west Akwesasne. This new village included Mohawks from Kahnawake and others from the south (NYCD 10:266-267, 301).

The northern Mohawk were in a tenuous position from 1667-1701. During these years the French were engaged in conflict with the Iroquois, particularly the Seneca and Onondaga. The northern Mohawk assumed the posture of allies of the French but were reluctant to become embroiled in these campaigns. The

southern Mohawk, similarly, refused to join in Iroquois expeditions against their northern brethren (JR 62:255). Nevertheless, some instances of conflict between the north and the south developed.

By the time peace was made between the French and the Iroquois in 1701, two-thirds of the Mohawk were living in the northern part of Kanienkeh (NYCD 4:648). During the middle historic period (1701-1799) the Mohawk were settled at Ticonderoga and Canojoharie in the south and Kahnawake (1676), Kanasatake (1721) and Akwesasne (1755) in the north, in addition to smaller villages of under ten longhouses scattered in both the south and north (Lydekker 1938:37, 40).

It should be pointed out that this expansion of the Mohawk to their own national frontiers was duplicated by the two other "older brothers" of the league of the Five Nations, the Onondaga and the Seneca. A group of Onondaga with a number of Oneida and Cayuga settled at Oswegatchie in the 1750s (NYCD 7:90, 278; 6:856). By moving to Oswegatchie the Onondagas received the same advantages in trade enjoyed by the Mohawk. They were still aligned with the southern Onondaga and able to deal through them with the English. They gained access to the French fur trade with the western nations and to trade with Montreal. Similarly, the Seneca expanded west towards the French fort at Niagara and into the Ohio Valley after the Peace of 1701 (Abler and Tooker 1978:507). They joined with the French alliance, although the eastern Seneca remained pro-English. By the time of the Seven Years War, then, the three most powerful nations of the

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