

Forums to look at land claim Quakers hope sessions will help avoid acrimony over Onondaga Nation claim.

By Mike McAndrew

Two hundred years ago, chiefs of the Iroquois Confederacy asked the Religious Society of Friends to monitor their treaty negotiations with the United States to make sure the Indians were not cheated out of land.

Four Quakers traveled by horse from Philadelphia through the wilderness to the Seneca Indians' village at Canandaigua to observe the talks.

The ensuing 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua secured to the Iroquois their lands and established methods for the two governments to resolve differences.

These days, Quakers in the Syracuse area are undertaking another project involving Iroquois land.

As the Onondaga Nation prepares to file a land claim suit against New York, the Syracuse Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends is preparing to defuse tensions that may develop between the Native Americans and neighboring landowners, said Joan Cope Savage, one of about 100 Quakers in the Syracuse Monthly Meeting.

The Syracuse Monthly Meeting will co-sponsor a series of public forums this spring, called "Voices on the Land," to encourage peaceful dialogue about the Onondagas' claim that New York illegally acquired about 70,000 acres from them in treaties from 1790 to 1822.

Colgate University philosophy and religion professor Christopher Vecsey and Syracuse University history professor Stephen Webb will speak about the role of New York State at the first forum at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday in Onondaga Community College's Storer Auditorium.

Other sessions will include presentations by Connie Tallcot, co-president of the Seneca-Cayuga Chapter of Upstate Citizens for Equality, a landowners group urging New York not to give the Seneca Nation land, and Doug George-Kanentiio, a Mohawk who frequently contributes commentaries to The Syracuse Newspapers on Native American issues.

A committee of Quakers who organized the forums said it

hopes the sessions will help Onondaga County avoid the acrimony that erupted over land claims filed by the Oneida and Seneca nations.

"We hope it will help create a more peaceful, less divisive process in Onondaga County," Savage said.

Onondaga Nation officials declined to be panelists at the forums, but are expected to attend, Savage said.

Onondaga Faithkeeper Oren Lyons said he is pleased the Quakers have organized the forums.

"They're very concerned about the reaction by these anti-Indian groups" in the Oneida and Cayuga nation land claim areas, Lyons said. "They want to try to find a balance and talk to the issue. I think they'll be helpful."

Onondaga Chief Irving Powless has said the nation intends to sue New York later this year in federal court. The Onondagas plan to claim New York violated federal law by purchasing about 70,000 acres from them, including nearly all of the city of Syracuse, the town of Onondaga and the villages of Solvay and Liverpool, and parts of the towns of Camillus, Geddes, LaFayette, Otisco and Salina.

Powless has said the Onondagas will not sue individual property owners or evict anyone from their homes.

"If everyone can hear everyone else's point of view in a non-threatening situation, they will have a better understanding," said Ann Tussing, a member of the Syracuse Monthly Meeting.

In 1971, Tussing, Savage and two other Quakers involved in organizing the forums, Alan and Jody Pike, served as witnesses when the Onondagas shut down Interstate 81 to protest New York's plans to widen the highway inside their territory.

"There was a danger of violent conflict," Savage recalled. "We and others were invited by the Onondagas to be witnesses to observe the outcome."

The Quakers have stood up for the Iroquois on many occasions, Lyons said.

"They're good, quality people," he said.

Syracuse-area Quakers did

not get involved in the Oneida or Cayuga land claims.

But the American Friends Service Committee, an independent corporation founded by Quakers, recently issued a position paper on all the Iroquois land claims in New York.

The paper concluded the Iroquois are the rightful owners of the lands they claim, but that any resolution of these claims should address the concerns of non-Indian residents about the safety and well-being of their communities.

"We believe that fair-minded people who seriously study the history of these claims will conclude that these lands were unjustly and illegally taken from the Iroquois nations," the paper said. "We oppose evicting any residents from the claim areas as well as forcing any landholders to unwillingly sell their homes or businesses."

The report states that the Iroquois nations should be compensated through the transfer of public lands; that New York state should shoulder the greatest burden of compensation; and that a negotiated settlement conducted with community involvement is the best way to resolve the claim.

The public can purchase the paper, written by Phil Harnden of Canton, a member of the Syracuse Monthly Meeting, for \$7.50 at the AFSC office at 420 1/2 Gifford St.

Savage acknowledged that the Quakers' long-standing concern over the welfare of the Iroquois might cause some to view the Quakers and the forums as biased.

"We're very aware that can be a limitation," she said.

But Tussing pointed out that everyone will be given a chance to express their views at the forums.

Annual Tree Giveaway to be Held at Hamilton Estate's Spring Bazaar

Akwesasne - Spring is just around the corner and the Hamilton Estate Cultural Center is hosting a Spring Bazaar on Saturday, May 13, 2000. In cooperation with the Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment, a seed and tree giveaway will be held at the Spring Bazaar. Please call Maxine at 358-9607 or Dave at 358-9513 for more information.

In addition to the giveaway, the event will feature a **craft and rummage sale**. Craft vendors are invited to register for the all-day event. There will be no charge for tables, but donations are appreciated. Contact Margaret at 358-2974 to register a table. Any donated items for the rummage sale may be dropped off at the Hamilton Estate offices during business hours, Monday through Friday. Items must be clean and in good condition.

The deadline for the name contest has been extended until Wednesday, May 3, 2000. Entries may be called in or dropped off at the Hamilton Estate offices, located just after the Hogansburg bridge. Mohawk names are encouraged.

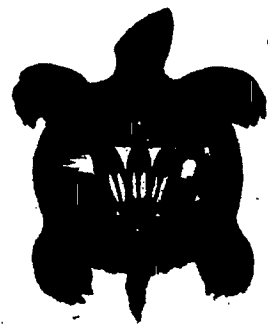
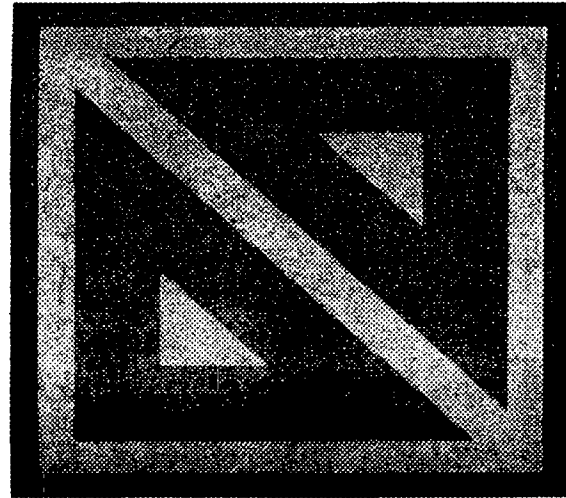
Kimball Union Honor Roll

Daryl Seymour, a junior at Kimball Union, is on the High Honor Roll for the third quarter.

Daryl is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Seymour of Rooseveltown, N.Y.

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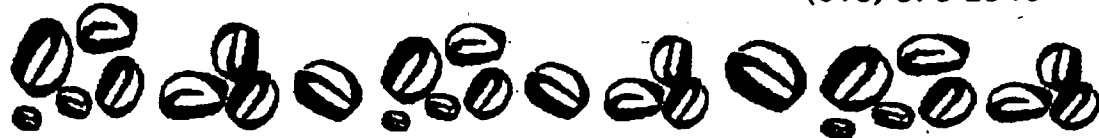
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