

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WW-14 The Iroquois Confederacy

III: The Current Resurgence

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Institute of Current World Affairs

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Dear Mr. Nolte:

Before European contact, the Iroquois men hunted and the women farmed. As the game disappeared the men grew idle. Christian missionaries had some success shaming the men into working the fields with their women, and by the end of the nineteenth century most Iroquois were farmers. In this century, the Iroquois have turned from farming to wage work to support themselves, although most families still living "on the res" have kitchen gardens. The children today go to local, in some cases all-Iroquois elementary schools, then on to white secondary schools. One in six goes on to higher education. In these terms, the New York Iroquois differ little from other low-income, rural Americans. Then what is still distinctively Iroquois about the Iroquois?

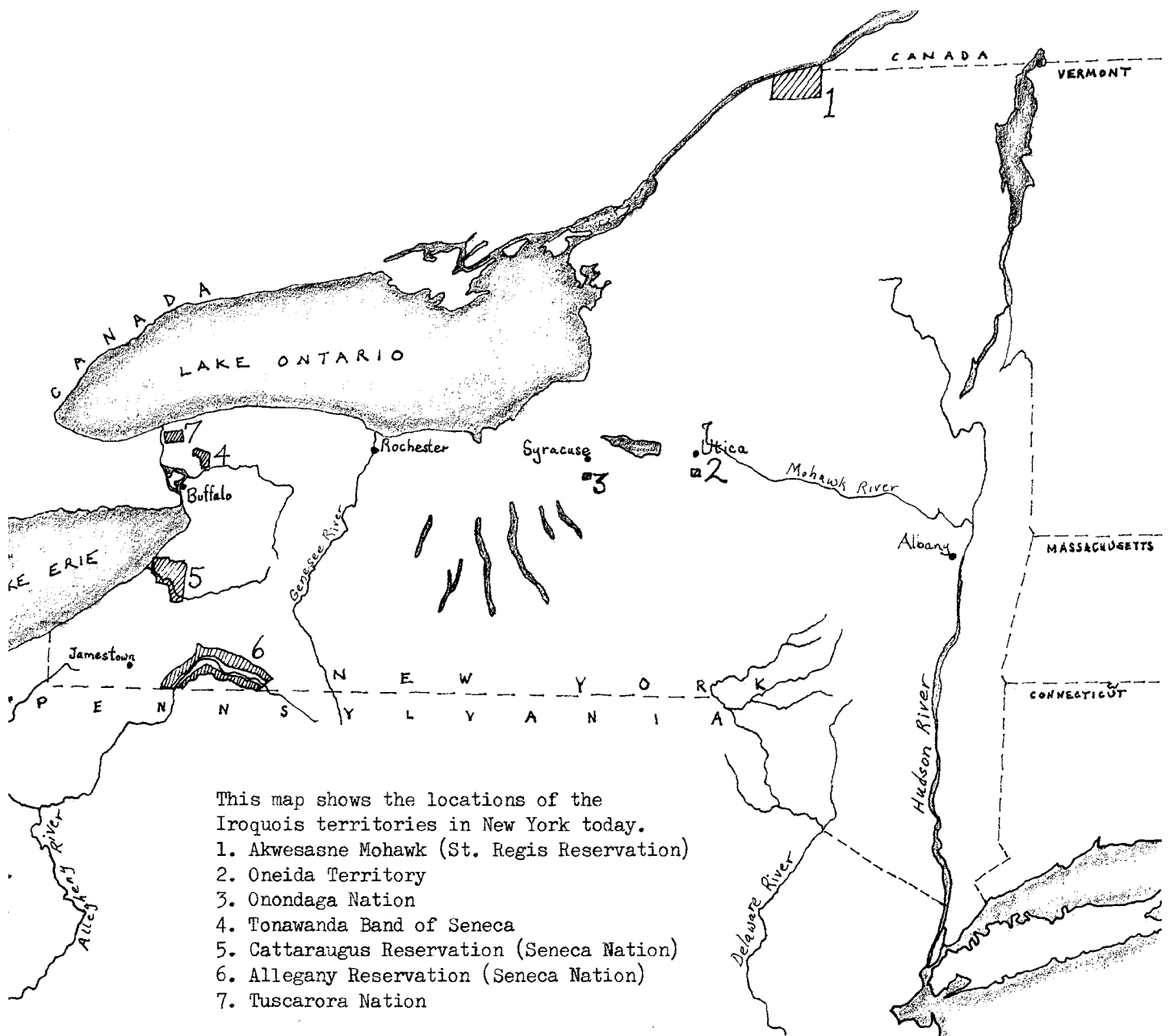
Little boys walk back and forth across the topmost iron span of the old bridge across the St. Regis River on the Mohawk Reservation. Three of them were up there one day in late May when I drove down out of the Adirondacks and across the bridge. Nobody chases them down. The accepted anthropological explanation of the Iroquois penchant for high-iron work draws a parallel between the traditional hunting and warring parties of the Iroquois and the modern iron-work teams. Two hundred years ago, the Iroquois men contributed to the maintenance of the family and the security of the nation almost entirely through his efforts away from home. Ordinarily the women went along on the long winter hunt, but they stayed behind in the base camp while the men were off for days at a time doing the actual stalking and killing. At the end of the hunt, the women and children returned to the home villages, and the men took the skins, furs, and meat to white settlements. There they traded for supplies and whiskey. When they returned, there were celebrations that, in the nineteenth century, often turned into drunken brawls. For the two-month summer hunt the men of a village went off without the women.

In the months not taken up with hunting, the men would visit other villages of their own nation or the Central Council Fire at Onondaga for meetings lasting weeks at a time. During the 300 years ending with the War of 1812, Iroquois military campaigns were carried out far from the home villages by small bands of warriors similar to the hunting parties in composition. The campaigns sometimes lasted as long as a year. The warriors' return with spoils, captives, and tales of conquest occasioned feasts, torture, and ceremonies of adoption.

Iroquois men began high-iron construction work when the first bridges were built across the St. Lawrence River in Mohawk country in the 1880's. An official of the company that built the first bridge on which Iroquois were employed has written: "It was our understanding that we would employ these Indians as ordinary day laborers....They were dissatisfied with this arrangement and would come out on the bridge itself every chance they got. It was quite impossible to keep them off. ...If not watched, they would climb up into the spans and walk around up there as cool and collected as the toughest of our riveters." By the 1930's, the Iroquois of all Six Nations had established a reputation as "naturals" for high-iron work. Today perhaps one Iroquois man in five either is or has been an ironworker.

Like their hunter-warrior ancestors, ironworkers usually travel in small bands from job to job doing risky, skilled, highly lucrative work. They determine their own schedule of work and vacation through the year. Periodically a gang returns to Iroquoia with earnings and stories enough to make life back "on the res" comfortable and dignified until the next expedition. While I was visiting a lacrosse coach in his small, thin-walled house on one of the reservations this spring, a grown son came home from Rochester for the weekend. He drove up in a 1973 Pontiac pulling a camper. His Seneca wife walked behind him with one of their three small children. When he came through the door the interior of the house was thrown into darkness. He is well over six feet tall, broad and well-muscled like a wrestler. He works the high iron. His nephews and a younger brother hung on him as he talked, and next day neighbors from all over the reservation came to a great picnic at the house.

There is more to the high-iron propensity than this one parallel between the aboriginal warrior's lifestyle and the itinerant, high-risk life of a modern ironworker. After all, military service, which has been popular with other Indians since World War II, offers some of the same opportunities, but the Iroquois generally avoid the armed services. (One writer has observed, however,



that those Tuscarora who do join up prefer the Air Force and parachute troops.) The standard explanation does not answer the most intriguing question, to me at least, about the Iroquois ironworkers: do the Iroquois have a congenital tolerance of heights, or is there something about the work that attracts them despite their normal fears?

Psychiatrist A. F. C. Wallace maintains that they do have a "psychological predisposition" for high work from birth. He says it is part of the Iroquois culture, and offers this quotation from an eighteenth-century white man writing about the Tuscarora while they were still in what is now North Carolina: "They will walk over deep Brooks and Creeks, on the smallest poles, and that without any Fear or Concern. Nay, an Indian will walk on the Ridge of a Barn or House and look down the Gable-end, and spit upon the Ground, as unconcern'd as if he

were walking on Terra firma."

Iroquois ironworkers do not incur fewer casualties than non-Iroquois ironworkers, and death from accidents in construction work have visited every Iroquois village and clan. As a population, then, the Iroquois suffer a disproportionate number of work-related deaths. Yet they keep going up on the high steel. The very risk of death appears to increase the allure of the work. Talking about a bridge collapse (he refers to it as "the disaster") that killed 35 Mohawk, an old ironworker told an investigator in 1949: "The little boys in Caughnawaga used to look up to the men that went out with the circuses in the summer and danced and war-whooped all over the States and came back to the reservation in the winter and holed up and sat by the stove and drank whiskey and bragged. That's what they wanted to do. Either that, or work on the timber rafts. After the disaster, they changed their minds-- they all wanted to go into high steel."

The high risk of death may have always attracted Iroquois men. To elaborate the standard parallel: an Iroquois warrior flouted death, and so does his modern descendant. He shaved his head bare but for a long top-knot, so that an enemy could get a good hold on his scalp. When captured, Iroquois warriors were reputed to sing during the torture, which customarily ended in death. Also, the Iroquois warriors were apparently the last North American natives to cook and eat the flesh of their enemies. (This was still done in the eighteenth century.) The Iroquois flirtation with death today may be an expression of the warrior's bravado intensified under the stress of modern Indian life. One old Seneca man I talked to, who has been working bridges all his life, from the little one fifty yards from his birthplace to the Golden Gate, said "I never cared about falling because I didn't care that much about dying."

As a group, Indians in the United States respond to the domination of an alien culture in characteristic, often self-destructive ways. Alcoholism and suicide, it is well known, occur among them at four times the national average. There are no separate statistics for suicide among the Iroquois, but they have grown up in the same social conditions as other Indians-- poverty, discrimination, educational programs destructive of their culture, and so on. It should not be remarkable that the possibility of a sudden, honorable death adds to the appeal of high steel for Iroquois men.

Driving through Iroquois territory from Montreal to Niagara Falls, if the weather is fair one sees few women and girls outside, some men, and lots of boys. They are either gathered together sticking their heads under the hood of one of the ailing cars that dot Iroquois yards, or practicing lacrosse. The cars-- rusted, stripped, irreparable, some of them, and others partly restored-- are not distinctively Iroquois. In fact, I was once instructed by a federal agency to consider the number of derelict cars to be a dependable short-cut index of the degree of impoverishment of any ghetto in the U.S., black, white, or Indian, urban or rural. The cars, then, are distinctively poor-American. The lacrosse is Iroquois.

All the woodland Indians apparently played lacrosse, just as desert and plains tribes played field hockey and meso-Americans played the court ballgame. Only the Iroquois, of all the North American natives, still play their ancient game. Originally the Iroquois lacrosse was a loosely organized game between two teams of perhaps fifty men each, played in a clearing of several acres. Like other early games, it served to train men for battle, and as a mechanism for the ritualized expression of intra- and inter-tribal hostilities. In a local match, the two teams were drawn from the two subdivisions (moieties) into which the clans were separated. These moieties are still recognized only among the Seneca, who speak of a person's membership either in the bird group (heron, snipe, deer, hawk) or animal group (bear, turtle, wolf, eel). In an international match, all-star teams were drawn from both nations and competed for several days.

One of the Six Nations Lacrosse League matches that I saw, between Morrisburg (N.Y.) and the St. Regis (Mohawk) Warriors left two men sidelined for two weeks with injuries, and another out for the season with a left leg fractured in two places. The coach of the Onondaga team told me that Indian lacrosse is not a violent game, certainly far less dangerous than non-Indian lacrosse. That was not my impression at the Massena Arena. Indian lacrosse is played in a space about equal to a hockey rink, and, like a rink, it is enclosed by a board fence. (Indian lacrosse is therefore called "box lacrosse," in contrast to field lacrosse played in Canada (it is their national sport) and some eastern U.S. universities. There are six men to a side in box lacrosse, and they use sticks about $\frac{3}{5}$ the size of field lacrosse sticks. All of that should make box lacrosse a slightly gentler game. As I peered through the plexiglass crowd-guard at the Arena, the Mohawk home crowd roaring around me, it looked mean.

Hitting the opponent with the stick, body-checking, and blocking go on virtually unrestrained. A coach later admitted that was so, despite rules to the

contrary. Since most teams are organized into three platoons, a man typically plays two minutes and rests for four. That makes the game fast. People call it "the fastest game on two feet." Players crash into each other running full speed. Sometimes the collisions do not advance the interests of either side, but the crowd loves them, particularly the ones that end in fights. There were three fights that night, two of them bloody.

When the second half began, the Warriors had the Morrisburg team at a disadvantage, 5 to 1, and the Morrisburg players were tiring fast. The Warriors showed no mercy. The leg was fractured in the third quarter. It may have been significant that Morrisburg is the only non-Indian team in the Six Nations League. I think I was seeing a little of that ritualized (and not so ritualized) expression of international hostility.

One strikingly Iroquois feature of life in Iroquoia, and an important link among the people is what is called the religion of the Longhouse. This non-Christian (though not exactly anti-Christian) "church" sprang from the ashes of aboriginal Iroquois beliefs in the mid-nineteenth century under the leadership of a Seneca Chief and visionary named Handsome Lake. I learned about the Code of Handsome Lake and the operation of the Longhouse religion from a Seneca gentleman named Harry Watt, who is a functionary of the Longhouse at the Allegany Reservation. Handsome Lake is better left to a later newsletter, but I should mention a few points about that religion here. A fairly complex cycle of festivals related to the growing seasons is celebrated by the Iroquois under the guidance of the Longhouse followers. From time to time Longhouse adherents from Tonawanda visit the Longhouses of other reservations for recitations of the sacred Code of Handsome Lake. Thus the Longhouse religion knits the various communities of Iroquoia together, regardless of their affiliation or differences with the hereditary system of government.

The number of adherents of the Handsome Lake religion is rising on all the reservations. It reached a low in the 1940's, but now seems to be experiencing a boom. Calculating the number of "pagans" versus Christians is tricky and probably futile, since many Iroquois partake of both religions to some extent. Of the seven Six Nations territories in New York, only two lack Longhouses for the use of Handsome Lake followers: Oneida, the 32-acre plot just restored to the Oneida people, and Tuscarora, near Buffalo.

I spent an afternoon with the presiding chief of the Tuscarora Nation on the breezeway of his neat, ranch-style house. He and a small son were working

in the family garden when I arrived. We all looked up at the low, black clouds that had moved in over the verdant Niagara escarpment where the reservation lies, high above the town and the Falls. It was going to storm.

Long contact with Europeans has introduced enough white blood into Iroquois veins to produce the full spectrum of coloration in the people today, from ruddy, dark "full-blood" (rare) to a lightness indistinguishable from Caucasian (also rare). The presiding chief of the Tuscarora has a light, mellow, blushing tan complexion, calm, youthful features, and kind eyes. He is 50. I would have guessed 40. He is a supervisor at a heavy equipment manufacturing plant, and has been a chief for 20 years.

This presiding chief is a member of the bear clan. By Tuscarora tradition, the presiding chief should be one of the two chiefs of the snipe clan, but the snipe clan has all but died out at Tuscarora. There is a snipe chief, but he is a minor, appointed by the clan mother when he was ten years old. A regent sits for him at council meetings. The chiefs decided it was necessary to break tradition to insure the smooth operation of government. Ignoring his clan affiliation, they appointed the bear clan chief presiding officer.

"After the War of 1812, the Tuscarora people had a choice. Both the Christian church and the Longhouse had been burned down. They decided to rebuild the church first, because in the church they could learn English and the white man's ways. They said they would build the Longhouse later, but they never have."

"Yes, the old ways are coming back. I can remember when there were maybe 15 Longhouse people here. Now there are 75 or 100, at least. They go down to Tonawanda for their meetings."

"Four years ago, some people here wanted to start a Singing Society, mostly for the young people. They began meeting and learning the old songs. It was a way of learning the language, too. Well, now it is very popular. They use the Council House for their meetings, every Tuesday and Friday night. It took a while for the Council to approve of that."

The presiding chief was a strong advocate of letting the Society meet in the Council House. The decision was important. It involved the question whether the chiefs would grant a degree of freedom and independence to Tuscarora young people, at a time when the Tuscarora adults were frightened and offended by some of the trends they saw among their adolescents. So the chiefs were deliberate. The presiding chief started speaking of the merits of the Singing Society three years ago. They were taping and learning ancient ritual chants that otherwise

might be lost when the old people died. It had strict rules: no one could belong who used drugs or alcohol. (The Temperance Society is another influential organization at Tuscarora, among the adults. It sponsors the only national cultural event, the New Year's Feast, a vestige of a traditional ceremony. The Code of Handsome Lake includes strict prohibitions against alcohol, and on reservations where the Handsome Lake religion is strong, the work of a temperance group is carried on by the Longhouse people.) The Society allowed no smoking at its meetings, although some tobacco was allowed in connection with traditional ceremonies performed as a part of the singing of rituals. The Society kept Tuscarora kids near home at night, away from the city, away from drugs.

By Iroquois tradition, Council decisions are not lawful unless they are unanimous. In sessions of the Council of the League at Onondaga, the Great Law specified a system for achieving unanimity: first the chiefs of each nation reached agreement; then the chiefs of the nations sitting on each side of the Council Fire reached agreement (Seneca and Mohawk on one side, Oneida and Cayuga on the other). These two sides presented their views. The Onondaga Chiefs, in the middle, mediated. In the meetings of the Council of Chiefs of the individual nations, no such procedure is prescribed, but unanimity is the rule. The Tuscarora Chiefs decided last winter, after three years of consideration, to allow the Society to use the Council House.

The presiding chief is satisfied with the decision and with the Society. "They clean up after themselves every time. The building is kept up better than ever."

How else are the old ways being revived? Like all the other Iroquois, the Tuscarora are working to save their language from deterioration and extinction. An Onondaga-Tuscarora woman teaches the Tuscarora language and culture in the all-Tuscarora elementary school and at the mixed white-Indian public secondary school. Adults learn the language and culture in twice-weekly classes funded three years ago by the State of New York. Most people know some Tuscarora, but it is becoming debased. Since it is spoken in fewer and fewer homes, esoteric vocabulary and niceties of grammar are disappearing.

In 1960 the New York State Power Authority won a case in the U.S. Supreme Court and took one-third of their land for a reservoir. The people's resistance to that seizure was fierce. More than one Indian militant was spawned by the clash between Robert Moses and the Tuscarora. The organizers of the Singing Society, the new adherents of the "pagan" religion of Handsome Lake, the Chiefs of the Tuscarora, virtually everyone in the community was influenced by the reservoir fight.

The mood of the nation is not militant, but the people are unyielding in their defense of what is left to them of their world. They live peaceably now in their fertile enclave of trailer homes and bungalows, vineyards, cherry orchards, and vegetable gardens, but they are a strong, conservative force in the Confederacy. When they were first admitted to the Longhouse as "little brothers" to the Seneca, they could send just one spokesman to the League Council. Now a full delegation of Tuscarora Chiefs attends, and increasingly they are allowed to represent their own interests.

Should one of the nations not now members of the Confederacy (the elective Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, or Mohawk) restore its hereditary chiefs to power and rejoin the Six Nations at Onondaga, the change would entail a real surrender of autonomy in favor of the League. The Mohawk have been developing light industry, a tourist business, and low-cost housing for the past ten years with federal assistance. The elective Seneca have an even closer relationship with the federal government, symbolized by a special liaison office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) located near the Seneca reservations to assist them in the administration of federal funds. (The Seneca Nation was given \$15 million by the federal government in 1964 to "rehabilitate" the Nation. The Seneca needed rehabilitation because in the same year the government seized the heart of the Seneca's Allegany Reservation, moved 830 of the reservation's 1400 population, and resettled them in look-alike ranch-style houses in relocation communities far from the riverbanks where they had lived for centuries. Their houses were burned and the land flooded by a reservoir created by the Kinzua Dam, a project constructed to protect the Pittsburg area from flooding. Public works have succeeded military conquest and forced sale as the twentieth-century menace to Iroquois homelands.)

It is generally accepted that such entanglement with federal funds and programs is discouraged by the Council of Chiefs at Onondaga, unless the federal money enters Iroquois treasuries in fulfillment of treaty obligations and free from conditions as to how it may be spent. The Iroquois constitution provides that the authority of all the League Chiefs is coextensive with the limits of the Confederacy. That means that the Council of League Chiefs may rule on the domestic affairs of individual nations. Should the Seneca or Mohawk nation renew its ties to the League, the Chiefs would probably modify the nation's relationship with the U.S. government, motivated by the conviction that the salvation of the Iroquois rests in the strict maintenance of sovereignty represented in the Two-Row Wampum. Just recently, the

Council of Chiefs' authority over local matters and their allergy to federal programs were illustrated in a case at Tonawanda.

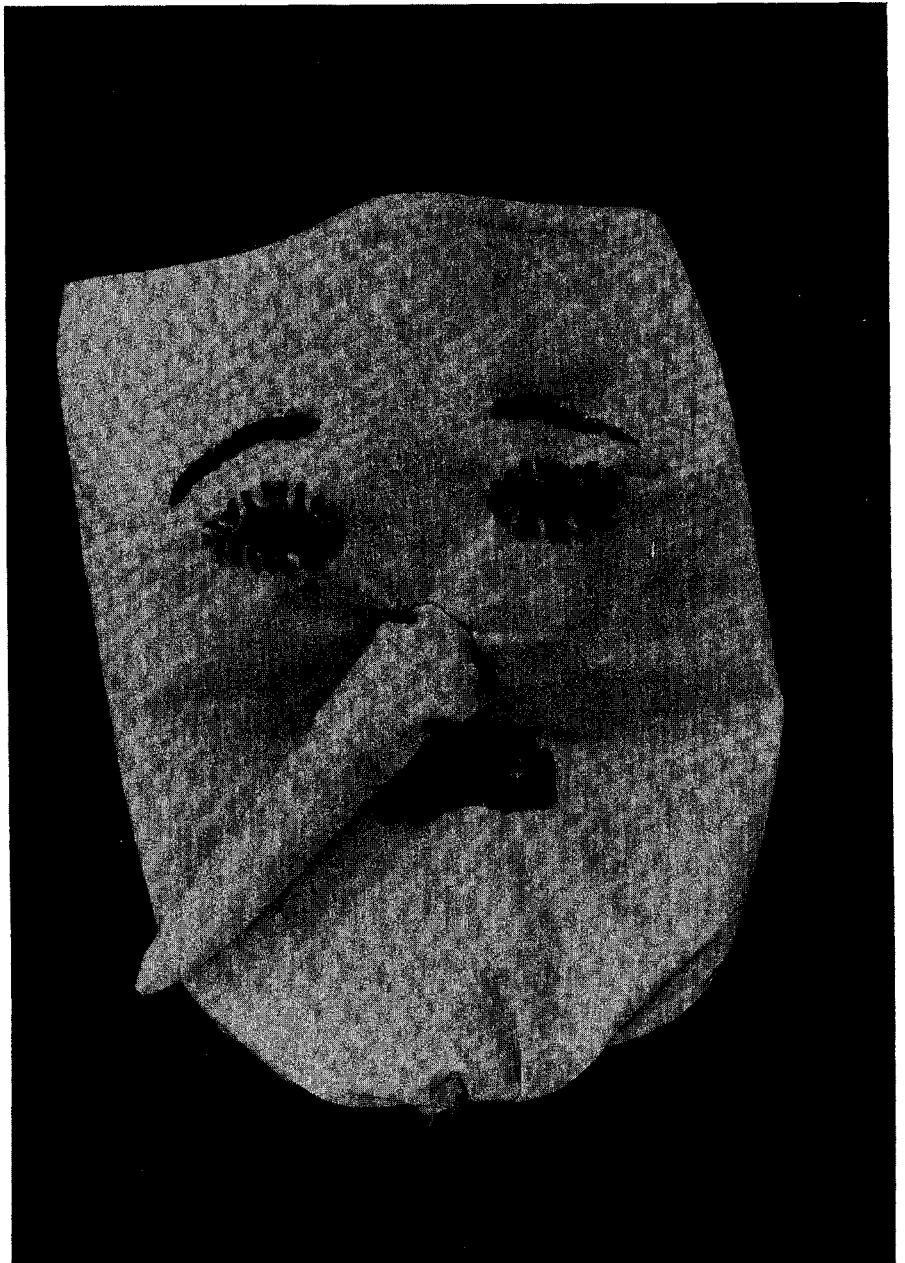
The Tonawanda Band of Seneca, you remember, broke away from the rest of the Seneca in the 1840's. The occasion of the schism was a land sale in which some hereditary chiefs were induced to sell three of the four Seneca reservations. The Tonawanda Seneca refused to leave their land, repudiated the sale, and eventually won the right to remain. When the rest of the Seneca deposed the chiefs and set up a republic, the Tonawanda Band continued under hereditary leadership and became the sole remaining Seneca community still subscribing to the Great Law. Bitterness still taints relations between the two divisions of Seneca.

The Tonawanda are proud of their reputation as conservatives. The prophet Handsome Lake found himself without honor at his own reservation-- Allegany Seneca-- within a few years of his first visions there. He and a few followers resettled at Tonawanda, and it was at Tonawanda that the religion of Handsome Lake developed during the years following his death. Today Tonawanda is still the see of the Longhouse religion. That fact explains its reputation as a vessel of traditions.

One still sees the old houses at Tonawanda, unpainted, crooked log cabins with hand-hewn shingle roofs. For a long time these old houses, and the less picturesque wood-and-tar-paper places, were good enough, and to some they were a source of pride. But lately people have seen the new houses at Allegany Seneca, Mohawk, and Tuscarora. The old Tonawanda houses lack adequate plumbing. They are cold and badly wired. So two years ago the Tonawanda Chiefs appointed a Housing Committee. With the help of a Buffalo professor, the Committee determined that of the roughly 120 houses on the reservation (excluding trailer homes), more than 80 per cent were substandard and incapable of being refurbished sufficiently to bring them within State housing codes. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was ready to help.

But the Tonawanda Nation is stymied. At a recent Council of the Confederacy Chiefs, a resolution was passed stipulating that the Tonawanda could not receive BIA funds without prior approval of the Confederacy Council. Whether the Confederacy Council will grant that approval when the BIA approves a grant is problematical. One Tonawanda I talked with, a member of the Housing Committee, implied that if the Tonawanda League Chiefs had been more alert at the Confederacy Council meeting at Onondaga, they could have avoided the present jam. They supported a resolution that apparently gave League approval to the Tonawanda application for BIA housing funds without realizing that it also placed a condition on the Tonawanda's acceptance of the funds.

Iroquois parents
used masks
like this one
to frighten children
into obedience.



Much as they may squirm under the thumb of the Confederacy Council, the Tonawanda Chiefs are not likely to rebel. The Tonawanda Seneca are establishment Iroquois.

The Council of Chiefs of the Confederacy claims that all the hereditary chieftainships convene at the periodic Onondaga meetings, but the Six Nations are clearly split. The Tuscarora, Onondaga, and Tonawanda Seneca are firm League members, while the other Seneca, Cayuga (mixed in with the latter), Mohawk, and Oneida, under elective governments, have forsaken the Longhouse. From the traditionalist viewpoint, these apostate governments, because they are elective, are illegitimate, but the people over whom they rule are still Six Nations Iroquois. Thus the Onondaga meetings of the Council of Chiefs of the Confederacy take up problems and affairs of all the Iroquois, despite the

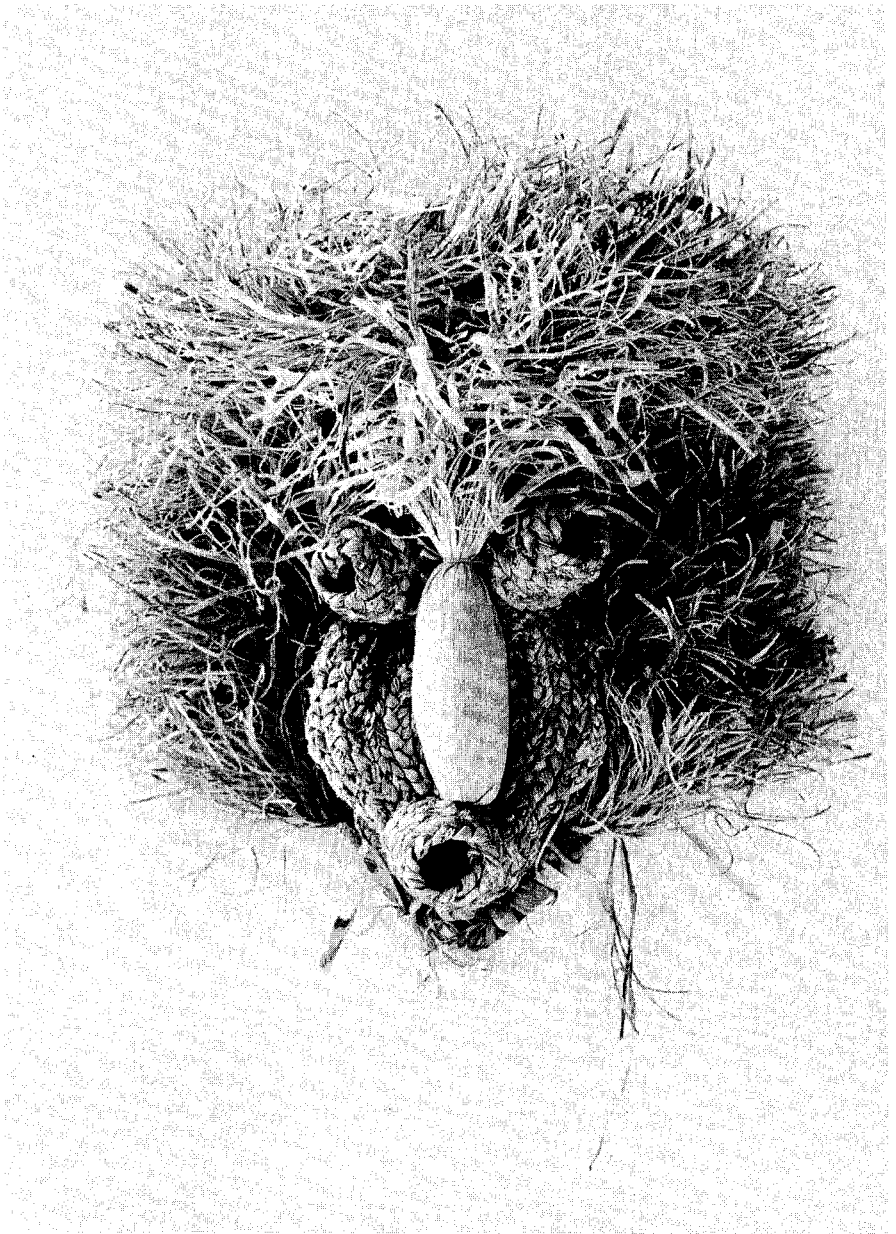
fact that the majority of Iroquois live in communities administered by what are from the traditionalist standpoint fraudulent authorities. The restoration of the League to perfect health depends on the repatriation of these four renegade nations. While that goal may be far, far from achievement, even opponents of reversion to traditional forms recognize a growing popular movement toward the hereditary chiefs, the "pagan" religion of Handsome Lake, and the like. Such a movement is expected at Tonawanda, Tuscarora, and Onondaga. What is significant is its presence at Oneida, the other Seneca reservations, and Mohawk.

For more than 100 years, the Oneida and the Cayuga have had no land of their own in New York. They were pushed out by settlers in the nineteenth century and led by missionaries to reservations in Wisconsin and Canada. The 400 or so Oneida that still live in Iroquoia, mostly among the Onondaga, include a vigilant Oneida nationalist who for 13 years has been the elected President of the Oneida. He is a self-taught expert on the labyrinth of state and federal laws relating to the Iroquois. (Like the convicts who master criminal law, a few lay-lawyers arise in each generation of American Indians. They are usually much better versed in Indian law than the schooled lawyers Indian nations hire to represent them in the courts.) Seven years ago he stepped in and successfully asserted the fee simple title of the Six Nations Confederacy to a little patch of land in central New York as it was being transferred from one non-Indian to another. Now that tract is the Oneida Territory (it lies in the heart of what had been Oneida homeland before the Revolution), inhabited proudly by six Oneida families in trailers, and possibly the first evidence of a phoenix-like revival of the Oneida Nation. In 1650 the Oneida held four million acres. By 1850 they had none. In 1966 they recovered these 32 acres. The goal: a million acres.

Because Oneidas are thoroughly enmeshed in the Onondaga community, and figure among the most outspoken of the Confederacy activists at Onondaga, the establishment of an independent Oneida Territory under the direction of an elected president has inspired some enmity. Yet the Oneida revival, though still inconsequential by measures of acreage and population, represents a legal victory that bolsters the claims of the Six Nations Confederacy to unextinguished sovereignty. The 1920 decision that opened the way for the formation of the new Oneida Territory was described as follows in the report of a Commission formed by New York State to investigate the legal status of the Confederacy.

An Indian by the name of Margaret Honyost had mortgaged 32 acres in Oneida, New York. In a few years, she was foreclosed and forced to

Corn-husk masks
are worn by
members of curing
societies to drive
off evil spirits.
They are still used today.



move. An Action was started by the U.S. District Attorney to declare the foreclosure illegal. The said action went to the Federal Circuit Court of northern New York with Judge George W. Ray presiding. After a long hearing, Judge Ray handed down a decision stating that the title to the land had never left the Six Nations. That the Iroquois Confederacy was still a Nation and had never given up its right of self-government. And in effect, therefore, no one but the Six Nations government could mortgage or sell one foot of the property guaranteed under the Treaty of 1784. The effect of this decision was that 32 acres then in the hands of an innocent purchaser reverted back to the Six Nations by Court order and so stands today. (On appeal, the decision was sustained.)

The Oneida President says that eventually the Territory will include another 750 adjacent acres held under equally insecure title by innocent non-Indians.

Further, dramatic aggrandizement of the Oneida Nation was assured last

fall when a claim entered in 1949 before the Indian Claims Commission was settled in favor of the Oneida, the Commission declaring that all the treaties were void by which New York State gained title to Oneida land except the few in which federal authorities were involved. This ruling nullifies 29 of 34 applicable treaties. Ordinarily restitution to a tribe is made in cash, especially where the land in question has been developed and settled by "innocent" non-Indians. The Oneida plan to hold out for a settlement of cash and land, a minimum of \$1 million and 22,000 acres. (The Seminole have rejected a \$45 million settlement for lands fraudulently taken, insisting that they receive land.) The negotiation of a settlement involves such questions as: how much should the Oneida receive for lands taken by the state and resold at a profit to the Whitneys and the Astors? The Oneida answer: sale price plus profit plus interest plus penalty interest.

While the President and his wife and I sat in the kitchen of their trailer, and two of their children watched "Bridget and Bernie" in the living room, they talked about their hopes for the Nation. First, the land must be secured. Then Oneida people will come home from Wisconsin and Canada. Will they? After all, they have been settled away from Oneida country for a hundred years. Some of them will, I am told. Two years ago, two busloads of Oneida from Wisconsin came to a unity meeting at Onondaga. They visited the new Oneida Territory, and took back to Wisconsin the news that soon there would be room for the Oneida in their New York homeland. The President proposes to develop jobs on and near the new territory when it is complete. Light industry will be attracted by tax advantages, and by federal law local Indians will be given preference in hiring. Then there would be all-Oneida schools. He plans to keep pressing Hamilton College nearby to give preferential treatment to Oneida applicants. The college was founded by Protestant missionaries for the purpose of civilizing Indians, particularly those of the Oneida territory where it was located.

The President's wife estimates that today barely ten per cent of her people speak Oneida. It is not too late to re-educate the people in their language, but time is short. Once the language is restored, people could again understand the songs and prayers of the Handsome Lake religion. Returnees from Wisconsin and Canada, together with the present New York nucleus, might represent among them all the Oneida clans. Lineages would have to be researched, old people consulted. The hereditary chiefs could be restored. The wampum of the clan matrons would have to be recovered from museums and attics. The Oneida Stone, a boulder necessary

to meetings of the Oneida Chiefs, would have to recovered from the Utica cemetery where it mysteriously came to rest during the Oneida dispersal.

There is a note of anguish and frustration in their voices as the President and his wife, often talking at the same time, deny that the Oneida Territory and its elected President are examples of "progressive" Iroquois straying from "conservative" ways. Thirteen years ago a President was elected because leadership was needed and the bankrupt hereditary system inoperative. Now, seven court cases and nine law firms later, it is possible to begin the reconstruction of the Oneida Nation, especially if the Oneida-Onondaga antagonism can be stilled.

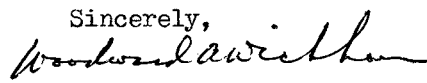
What explains the Iroquois revival? I asked a chief at Onondaga. "The change in attitude. The change of attitude in your people." The State finally won, in court, the right to go ahead with the climbing lane on Interstate 81, but they never finished it. You can see it peter out as you drive up that grade. But there is still plenty of misunderstanding of the Confederacy among "our people." We have softened, I think, have begun to listen better, but the stirring in the Iroquois Longhouse also reflects a change among the Iroquois. Young Iroquois have grown up during the civil rights movements, the New Frontier (an unfortunate expression from the Indian point of view), hearing public outcries against genocide and official endorsements of cultural diversity. In non-Indian schools and colleges, and under the influence of the media, young Iroquois have become politically savvy. They are putting their education to use, many of them, in behalf of Iroquois nationalism. They may be imperfect speakers of the mother tongue, but they are allied with the old people, who speak it well. Some of these young Iroquois mounted a Unity Caravan to tour the U.S. several years ago, informing Indian people of all nations about traditional government and Indian sovereignty. It was an important stimulus to the current assertion of rights and authority by native Americans.

Among the elective Seneca, who constitute nearly half the on-reservation Iroquois population, whose national treasury and standard of living exceed all the others, whose democratic government has always seemed impervious to traditionalist pressure, there is serious talk of returning to hereditary leadership. And the talk is inspired by the young. A handful of college-educated, urban Seneca from Buffalo objected to the Nation's decision to allow the Fisher-Price Toy Company to locate a \$6 million plant on the Cattaraugus Seneca Reservation. Finally Fisher-Price could not wait for the Nation to get together and withdrew to another site.

With it the company took 1,000 potential jobs, for which Seneca would have been favored. At the last biennial election, the incumbent "progressive" government

was replaced by conservatives supported by young activists, among others. The elective system is not directly threatened at this time, but the undercurrent favoring a return to hereditary leadership is strong. It will be interesting to see what happens when the Salamanca lease comes up for renewal. Salamanca is an odd (white) railroad town in the middle of the Allegany Seneca Reservation. It grew up there in the nineteenth century on land leased from the Seneca Nation. The leases have been adjusted in favor of the Indians from time to time, but the Seneca still resent the town. And vice versa. A former Seneca President told me, however, that "as the time for the renewal of the lease gets closer, the people in Salamanca get friendlier and friendlier."

At the other end of Iroquoia, at the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation, there is a comparable undercurrent of traditionalist activism, and its partisans, too, tend to be the young, educated, and well travelled. Besides the hereditary chiefs, a sort of shadow government to the elected chiefs recognized by state and federal authorities, the most noticeable manifestation of an aggressive conservative movement is Akwesasne Notes. (The pre-contact name for the Mohawk settlement on the St. Lawrence is Akwesasne-- a/kweh/SASS/nee, meaning "Where the Partridge Drums." It was renamed St. Regis under Catholic influence.) Notes is the only periodical I know of that regularly reports most important U. S., Canadian, and Latin American Indian news. It accomplishes this by reprinting articles from other publications, which it supplements with news, features, poetry, and miscellaneous services of its own. It is indispensable to a balanced view of Indian affairs, since virtually all other papers publish reports on Indian affairs written by non-Indians. Notes is free. It ekes out an issue-to-issue existence on donations. The Iroquois and friends who publish it work out of a non-descript old house at St. Regis-- that is, Akwesasne. When I was there, its porch was choked with bundles of Notes unmailed because the U.S. Post Office had rescinded, for the second time in a year, the Notes' second-class permit. Some say the Post Office is harrassing Akwesasne Notes. If you want to receive Notes, write to them at Mohawk Nation
via Rooseveltown, N.Y. 13683.

Sincerely,

Woodward A. Wickham

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