

their battles. The non-natives authors rarely point out that the European powers were hardly innocent of this type of behavior themselves. In fact, they promoted the annihilation of native nations that traded with their competitors, and directed (and often participated in) the torture of their enemies. (Colden 1958:121-123) When natives took up the hatchet, it was only after peaceful means of settling differences had been exhausted, and their tactics were more for self-preservation than anything else. It is only logical that an enemy will tend to keep his distance if he believes you are capable of the most horrible atrocities.

One must keep in mind, however, that the documentation that has been preserved from this era reflects only the point of view of the European explorers, fur traders, missionaries, military officers and colonial administrators who recorded it. They may have painted our ancestors in the worst possible light to justify their own questionable actions on the New World frontier. Even today, textbooks provided to schoolchildren are often little more than thinly-disguised pieces of propaganda which minimize the more negative aspects of North American history and trivialize native customs and belief systems. Students are thus deprived of the knowledge of the many native contributions to modern society and ultimately robbed of an honest understanding of our key role in American and Canadian history.

During the entire colonial war period, which encompassed most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy held such power and influence that one modern historian refers to it as the "Anvil of America." (Brandon 1987:184-211) When colonial powers could not destroy the Haudenosaunee through warfare, they sought to win them over as allies. And strong allies they were. Had the relationship between colonial powers and Haudenosaunee been different, it is possible that the Americas would be populated by a French-speaking people today. The influences of the Haudenosaunee were that critical.

The Mohawk Migration to the Village of Prayer

During the seventeenth century French Jesuits entered Mohawk and Haudenosaunee territory to convert them to the Christian faith. The Mohawks were suspicious at first; they knew that the "Black Robes" held a position of power among their mortal enemies, the Huron and the Algonquin. Jesuit Father Isaac Jogues, who had been captured during a Haudenosaunee attack on a party of Hurons in 1642, was taken to a Mohawk village for a time and eventually escaped. When the Haudenosaunee and the French agreed to a cease hostilities in 1645, the Jesuits were allowed to enter their villages more or less as peace envoys. Jogues returned to the Mohawks in 1646, but he and his companion were slain one month later, possibly because certain Mohawks blamed him for a smallpox outbreak that decimated their village after his escape a few years earlier. Other Jesuits such as Bressani, Poncet, and Le Moyne appeared on the scene during this time as well, but missionary work suffered greatly from renewed hostilities that saw the three main Mohawk villages destroyed by French expeditions in 1666. In 1667 French Jesuits Fremin, Pierron, and Bruyas re-established missions among the new villages, and by 1668 there were Catholic missions among all of the Haudenosaunee nations. (Beauchamp 1976:183-219)

Missionary work was made easier with the presence of Christian Huron and Algonquin captives among the Haudenosaunee, but the conversion of the Haudenosaunee was often contentious. New converts often found themselves shunned by neighbors who still resented the French Jesuits for their association with the Governor of New France, whom the Haudenosaunee called Onontio ("Man On The Mountain"). Maintaining a strategic position in the fur trade meant playing European powers off one another, and the fact that some of their people were forging such close ties to the French was a cause of considerable tension. (Shea 1855:263-274)

In time, however, the Jesuits led as many as 1000 to 1500 converts to a new settlement near Montreal where they could practice their new religion without the harassment of their neighbors. This mission was called

St. Francis Xavier du Pres and was located at la prairie de la Magdeleine (La Prairie). Its population was made up primarily of Mohawk and Oneida converts, but in time Hurons and Onondagas joined the mosaic. For many years the mission served as a buffer from attacks on the French by the English and their Haudenosaunee allies. (Fenton and Tooker 1978:469-471)

Kateri Tekakwitha

The most famous Mohawk convert of all was Kateri Tekakwitha, a young woman orphaned and scarred by a smallpox epidemic in the Mohawk Valley. Her story gives us a good look at the atmosphere in the villages when the migrations to the Village of Prayer took place. Her adoptive father was a chief who saw the advent of Christianity as a destructive force that weakened the Mohawk people and made them subservient to the French. He refused to allow Kateri to be baptized by the visiting Jesuit missionaries, but she did so in secrecy and migrated to the Village of Prayer in 1677. Her uncle's fears were ultimately realized: Mohawk Chief Kryn (also known as Kaneakowa, or "The Great Mohawk" and Joseph Togouiroui) encouraged more Mohawks to move to the Catholic missions and eventually led war parties against his own people. It has been estimated that the migration of Christian Mohawks to Laprairie left the villages in the Mohawk Valley with half of their original population.

Kateri, like many of her fellow converts, was unconcerned about the political consequences of her conversion. Instead,



she dedicated herself to her new faith with a devotion that even the Jesuits found astonishing. The village in which she lived heard its share of rumors of impending attacks and warfare, but she chose a pious life of prayer, humility, and penance. When she died in 1680, she was only 24 years old. A Jesuit priest observed that at the time of her death the smallpox scars on her face were miraculously healed. (Weiser 1972:160-161) Miracles have been attributed to her in the three centuries since her death, and she has thousands of advocates in North America and the rest of the world who promote her canonization as a saint. In 1980 the "Lily of the Mohawks" was beatified by Pope John Paul II. The following is an extract of the speech he delivered at Kateri's Beatification Mass:

"The last months of her life are an even clearer manifestation of her solid faith, straightforward humility, calm resignation and radiant joy, even in the midst of terrible sufferings. Her last words, simple and sublime, whispered at the moment of her death, sum up, like a noble hymn, a life of purest charity: 'Jesus, I love you...'"

Kahnawake

In 1676 the occupants moved their settlement upriver to Sault St. Louis (the present Lachine Rapids) and renamed it Kahnawake, which means "At The Rapids." It was named after a village in the Mohawk Valley where many of the converts, including Kateri Tekakwitha, had once lived. (The southern Kahnawake was ultimately destroyed by a French raid in 1693. Today there is a shrine to Kateri near the excavated site of the village a mile west of Fonda, New York.) Europeans referred to the northern Kahnawake as Caughnawaga and its people as Caughnawagas, which reflected the multi-national population of the Christian mission, but the Mohawk culture and language was dominant. The name of the mission was changed to St. Francis Xavier du Sault.

The northern Kahnawake moved twice since 1676, usually due to soil erosion and the increasing disruptions caused by the population of Montreal. Since 1716 it has

been located on the south shore of the St. Lawrence just east of where it is fed by the Chateauguay River. (Fenton and Tooker 1978:470-471)

In time the Hurons and some of the Mohawks broke off from the growing settlement. The Hurons moved to Lorette, and the Mohawks eventually found themselves on the northern shore of the Lake of Two Mountains where another Catholic mission was established in 1721. (Surtees 1985:68) This community was called Kanesatake, or "Place Of The Silvery Sands" or "Place of Reeds" and it was also home to Nipissings and Algonquins. Today it occupies a territory that is checkerboarded by the non-native township of Oka.

Although the Jesuits petitioned the French government for the lands on which these missions were established, it is important to note that the Mohawks themselves did not. They considered the area Mohawk territory and did not recognize that France had any claim to it. Although many of the people migrated to those villages because of the Catholic missions, there was a political and economic motivation at play. They believed that they were only reoccupying the northern frontier of Kanienke and placing themselves closer to the French fur traders at Montreal. With ties to the French in the north and the British in the south, they would be able to bargain for better prices from both by threatening to favor the other if they did not like the prices of the one. This was a wise plan, but the competition between the two colonial powers eventually proved too divisive.

Blood Among Brothers

Under pressure, men from the northern "Praying Indian" villages often acted as scouts and went into battle alongside the French militia in the series of imperial conflicts known as the French and Indian Wars. This alliance brought them into confrontations with their Haudenosaunee brothers, who at the time held firm to a "Covenant Chain" of friendship with the British. They were naturally reluctant to fight fellow Haudenosaunee, but at times the heat of battle led to transgressions of this neutrality.

On one occasion in 1686, Mohawks from Kahnawake accompanied a French "peace envoy" led by Marquis de Denonville that actually turned out to be a surprise attack against the Haudenosaunee. Sixty chiefs were captured and enslaved. The French later attacked Seneca territory with their Kahnawake allies. (Beauchamp 1976:232-233)

The Kahnawake Mohawks would later come to regret their role in these expeditions when the Haudenosaunee launched a fierce 1,500 man attack against the French and their native allies in 1689. (Beauchamp 1976:235) First they struck an Algonquin village on the island of Montreal, then they raided Lachine and its fort, forcing the Kahnawake Mohawks to seek refuge within the walls of Montreal for protection. (Surtees 1985:68)

The Confederacy renounced the Kahnawake Mohawks as traitors for having led French forces into their former homelands, but efforts to lure them back to the Mohawk Valley continued. (Frisch 1971:52)

The Unredeemed Captives

These violent times also saw Kahnawake warriors take part in French raids on settlements in New England. The most famous was the 1704 raid on Deerfield, Massachusetts, in which 47 people were killed and 112 were taken captive. Among them were Reverend John Williams and members of his family. When Williams and 57 others were returned in 1706, his daughter Eunice refused to leave her adopted Kahnawake. Her descendants would eventually become prominent in

Akwesasne. (Hough 1853:123)

In 1707 three young captives, Sarah, John and Zechariah Tarbell, were taken from the town of Groton, Massachusetts, by a Kahnawake war party led by Chief Taxous. After a harrowing trip to the northern shore of the St. Lawrence River, Sarah, 14, was sold to a wealthy French family in Montreal and later entered the convent at Notre Dame. John, 12, and Zechariah, 7, were adopted into the Kahnawake tribe. When they reached adulthood they were said to have married the daughters of chiefs Sakonentsiask and Atawenta. They returned to Groton in 1739 to visit their relatives, but like many white people taken captive by natives, they had no desire to leave their adoptive people. (Boston Daily Traveler, March 8, 1890) Eventually they were among the group of 20 to 30 families who left Kahnawake at the onset of the Great War for Empire, also referred to by some historians as the French and Indian War, in the fall of 1754. This migration would eventually bring them to Akwesasne. (Frear 1983:9-10)

The Founding of the St. Regis Mission

There is some question over whether the exodus from Kahnawake was prompted by soil exhaustion, problems caused by French alcohol, frictions within the community, or a combination of all three. Whatever the reasons, the Kahnawake migrants paddled their canoes upriver with Father Pierre-Robert-Jean-Baptiste Billiard and stopped for a time on the southern shore of Lake St. Francis, a very wide part of the St. Lawrence River northeast and downstream from their ultimate destination.

Next they moved westward to the eastern banks of the St. Regis River, whose Mohawk name at that time, Akwesasne, referred to the abundance of partridge along its shores. The migrants stayed one winter there. In the spring of 1755 they crossed the river and settled permanently

on the peninsula west of the mouth of the Akwesasne River. The mission that was established there was named after a French priest, John Francis Regis, who had recently been canonized. (Although Saint Regis had never been to America, it was his desire to become a missionary to the native people here.) The Akwesasne River, and the mountain from which it descends, would also bear the name St. Regis from then on.

This was recognized as the first permanent settlement in what is now northern New York and its population numbered from 200 to 300 people. A small church was made of logs and covered with bark, much like the Mohawk family dwellings of that era. With the grant of a saw mill by the French governor, a second one made of timber was constructed, followed by one of stone in 1793. Father Billiard died in 1757. Father Antoine Gordon, the superior at Kahnawake who is credited as a founder of the St. Regis mission, came to Akwesasne in 1760 and stayed until 1775. (Frear 1983:4-5) Father Huguet, Gordon's assistant at Kahnawake, had made periodic visits to Akwesasne in the years when it was without a permanent pastor; upon Gordon's departure from Kahnawake, Huguet succeeded him there.

To be continued next week. Complete bibliography for sources cited to be featured in a future issue along with acknowledgements. Indian Time welcomes comments from readers, please drop us a line. Also, your contributions in the way of historical documents, old maps, photos, oral history, etc., etc., would be greatly appreciated. Copyright 1993 by Darren Bonaparte. Reproduction or duplication of this material is expressly forbidden without written permission of the author. Unauthorized photocopying will destroy your photocopier, so don't even try!

