



Mohawk elders maintain that Akwesasne had always been used as a summer hunting ground prior to the "founding" in 1755, and they point to the archeological sites on various islands that go back thousands of years as proof.

Another clue comes from the Governor of New France, Duquesne, who stated in a letter to his superiors that the reason he promoted the establishment of the St. Regis mission was to encourage further Mohawk and Haudenosaunee migration from the British influences in the Mohawk Valley, not to provide a new settlement for the overcrowded Kahnawake families. (DRCHSNY 10:301) His goal was to strengthen the French frontier while at the same time weaken Britain's hold on her Haudenosaunee allies.

Although the French government's motives were at times at odds with the motives of the French Jesuits, in this case they managed to serve each other's purposes at the same time as their own. The Kahnawake families who moved to Akwesasne may have been seen as an enticement for Mohawks in the south to migrate north. Since there was a great deal of communication between the two groups, the people in the Mohawk Valley were aware that Kahnawake was overcrowded. Therefore, the settlement at Akwesasne was preferable.

Some may argue, however, that if a large scale migration from the Mohawk Valley did occur, it surely would have been noted with much concern by the "Mohawk Baronet" William Johnson, whose main priority was to assure a strong Mohawk fighting force for the English in the region near Albany. Akwesasne was located directly on the frontier of New France at the St. Lawrence River, so if there had been a Mohawk Valley migration to this area, it had to have been very limited to escape the watchful eye of the hawkish Johnson. In this respect, the historical record offers little evidence to determine when and to what extent the Mohawk Valley migration occurred, if it really did. We do know, from Duquesne's letter of July 6, 1754, that negotiations with Mohawk leaders did take place in Montreal and that the Mohawks were willing to leave the Mohawk Valley to join their Kahnawake kin at Akwesasne:

"My negotiations with the Mohawks succeeds admirably, as you will see by their propositions, but they cannot settle in the village of the Sault St. Louis, because the lands in that quarter are exhausted, so that more than thirty families belonging to that mission, being unable to collect wherewithal to feed themselves, are going to settle at Lake St. Francis, twenty leagues above Montreal, on the south side, where there are very good lands; the Mohawks have agreed with these thirty families to go and settle their village at this place, whither a missionary will accompany them..." (DRCHSNY 10:266-267)

The Mohawk people continued to be pawns in the political chess game between the French and English, as were other natives. The historical record is quite clear about two other migrations that happened as a result of the British northward campaign against New France in the last years of the Great War for Empire. As we will see, these migrations brought Christian Abenakis, Onondagas, Oneidas, and Cayugas to The Land Where The Partridge Drums.

#### The Oswegatchie Migration

In 1760 another French mission known as Oswegatchie (located on the southern banks of the St. Lawrence River at present-day Ogdensburg, New York) fell into English hands as forces under General Jeffrey Amherst swept the St. Lawrence region. Oswegatchie had been established in 1749 by Abbe Francis Picquet, a Sulpician priest who had previously been assigned to Kanasatake. This mission's original purpose was to draw more Haudenosaunee away from British influence in the south, but it was quickly fortified because of its strategic location on the St. Lawrence River and was henceforth known as *Fort La Presentation*. (Blau, Campisi, and Tooker 1978:494-495) Like the warriors from Kahnawake and other "French Indian" settlements along the St. Lawrence River, natives from this mission fought against the British during the Great War for Empire. The Oswegatchie mission began to disintegrate after the departure of Picquet in 1760; he could not envision working under a British regime that now controlled the St. Lawrence River. Around this time some of its occupants, mostly Onondagas, Oneidas, and Cayugas, moved to Akwesasne where they were "absorbed" into the population. More arrived when Oswegatchie was dismantled by the Americans in 1806. This is the reason why there are Deer and Snipe Clan people living in Akwesasne today, along with the primary Mohawk clans of Bear, Turtle, and Wolf. Akwesasne readily accepted the refugees and assumed the Oswegatchie territory, which covered lands in the St. Lawrence River valley from Gananoque River to the present town of Prescott, Ontario. (Williams 1991:74)

#### The Seven Nations of Canada

With the dissolution of Oswegatchie, Akwesasne assumed its membership in the loose alliance known as the Seven Nations of Canada. This confederation, which held its own "Grand Council" in Kahnawake, also consisted of Algonquians, Hurons, Nipissings, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Abenakis from Christian missions in the area. It provided them with an important link, both political and cultural, to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, but its ties to the French (who promoted the union) were sometimes just as strong, if not stronger. Previous to Akwesasne's assumption of Oswegatchie's membership, Akwesasne was considered a "branch" of Kahnawake. (Blanchard 1983:9-22)

Membership in the Seven Nations of Canada required that the Mohawks send chiefs to attend the Grand Council in Kahnawake. Prior to the arrival of the Oswegatchie refugees, Akwesasne is believed to have had nine chiefs operating under the system used by Kahnawake at the time. In this system, the clan mothers of the Bear, Wolf, and Turtle clans chose three chiefs, or Rotinonkwiseres (also known as "Longhairs") from among their clans who would hold their positions for life, hence the title "Life Chief." This was the way chiefs had been chosen back in the Mohawk Valley days. With the arrival of other Haudenosaunee at Akwesasne, it has been suggested that three more chiefs were added to the Council of Life Chiefs, bringing it to a total of twelve, but there appears to have been times when not all of the titles were held.

#### Fire Destroys the Church

In 1762 a fire destroyed the fledgling church and all of its records. Also lost was the relic of Kateri Tekakwitha that accompanied the original settlers from Kahnawake. The church was quickly rebuilt that year. (Hough 1853:115) This was also the year that the deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs, Daniel Claus, began to suspect the newly-arrived Jesuit, probably Father Antoine Gordon (a Frenchman), of trying to stir up trouble against the British. It is noted that his efforts were unsuccessful in rousing the passions of the war-weary Mohawks--if that was, in fact, what he was trying to achieve. Father Gordon departed from Akwesasne for health reasons in 1775, leaving the mission without a resident priest for the next ten years.

#### The Abenaki Incident

In 1759, just before the British captured Oswegatchie, British forces in the form of Roger's Rangers raided Odanak, a pro-French Abenaki settlement at St. Francis River near Pierreville, Quebec, killing half its population and forcing the rest of its inhabitants to seek refuge among fellow Christian Indian settlements such as Akwesasne. By 1767 the Abenaki village at Odanak was rebuilt, and the Mohawks urged them to return to it. The Abenakis had been ancient enemies of the Mohawks until they became members of the Seven Nations of Canada, and their stay in Akwesasne wasn't without a degree of tension. A white fur trader by the name of N. B. Hartell accompanied them from Odanak, and his presence agitated the Mohawks. A faction of Abenaki, prompted perhaps out of business obligations to the fur trader, not only began to insist that they had as much right to occupy Akwesasne as the Mohawks, but began to destroy Mohawk traplines in the region as well as those belonging to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Both groups put pressure on Sir William Johnson to have them return to Odanak. (Frisch 1971: 67-68)

Hartell managed to convince the Governor of Canada, Sir Guy Carleton, that the Abenakis had settled Akwesasne at the same time as the Mohawks. (Miller 1976:50) He granted them permission to remain, but Sir William Johnson remembered the promise of protection he had made to the Mohawks during the French and Indian War. At a conference held in the Mohawk Valley at German Flatts, Johnson told the Abenakis that the Mohawks

"...are descended from the Original Proprietors (and) ...You who were born in another part of the Country can claim no Title to Land but where you were born, wherefor You should not intrude, or press Yourselves on these people without their inclination..." (Miller 1976:51-53)

Some of the Abenaki finally returned to St. Francis in 1771, but they left behind a number of families and people who had married into the Mohawk community. (Frisch 1971:69)

#### Mohawk Title To Akwesasne

The incident with the Abenaki refugees caused considerable alarm for the Akwesasne Mohawks, mainly because Father Gordon had not secured a land grant "title" from the French government to the lands on which they lived. Naturally, as the ancient occupants of the territory, the Mohawks felt that the land was not the French Governor's to grant in the first place, but as evidenced by the Abenaki incident, the lack of a documented title posed problems with the conquering English government after the French and Indian War. Gordon greatly angered the Mohawk chiefs on this account; they accused him of deliberately deceiving them about the land grant issue for his own personal gain.

In retrospect, however, it's doubtful whether a French title would have mattered to the English even if the Mohawks had presented one. "His Most Christian Majesty," like his counterpart in Paris, only entertained such notions when it was politically expedient. Fortunately, Sir William Johnson was in just such a mood when the problems with the Abenaki flared up.

This would not be the last time Akwesasne Mohawks would experience great community turmoil over the size and scope of our territory. Nor would it be the last time that European superpowers would clash over rights to the land that was never theirs to begin with. Tragically, it was a few of our own people who would become their greatest weapons in that titanic battle, and it would be our own people who would lose the most.

**Next Week:**  
**A Nation Divided**  
**The Rivalry and Intrigues of**  
**Captain Joseph Brant and**  
**Colonel Louis Cook**