Mohawk elders maintain that Akwesasne had already been used as a refuge hunting ground prior to the "founding" in 1765, and they point to the archeological evidence, which 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 mission promoted the establishment of the St. Regis Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Duquesne was not to provide a new settlement for the people in the Mohawk Valley, nor to promote the establishment of the St. Regis Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Both groups that assimilated with the missions were sometimes just as strong, if not stronger, than the rest of its 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, a Mohawk nation 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 a large scale migration from the Mohawk Valley did not occur, and that there was no enticement with much concern by the "Mohawk Barron" William Johnson, whose main priority was to assure a strong Mohawk force for the English in the region near Albany. Akwesasne was located directly on the front 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 bawdik Johnson. In this respect, the historical record often 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, 1764, that negotiations with Mohawk leaders did take place in Montreal and that the Mohawks were willing to leave the Mohawk Valley to join their Kahmiwake kin at Akwesasne.

"My negotiations with the Mohawks succeeded admirably, as you will see...I encourage them to settle in the village of the St. Lawrence as they have been induced to do by that quarter exhausted, so that thirty or forty families belonging to that mission, being unable to collect whatsoever to feed themselves, are going to settle at Lake St. Francis, twenty leagues from Lake Ontario..." - Captain Joseph Brant and Colonel L... is Cook

The Mohawks continued to be pawns in the political three 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, from the French mission at St. Francis, and Cayugas to the Land Where The Ftiendire Drumms.

The Oswegatchie Migration

In 1769 another French mission known as Oswegatchie was relocated 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 Jesuit priest who had previously been assigned to Katawanke. This mission's original purpose was to draw more Haudenosaunee away from British influence in the south, but it was quickly forfeited because of its strategic location on the St. Lawrence River and was henceforth known as Fort La Preserntation. (Blau, Camps, and Tooker 1979:494-495). 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 strengthen in this period and fought in the last years of the war in 1766; he could not envision working under French patronage. The St. Lawrence settlement was strengthened in 1766 and 1768; more and more arrived when it was strengthened. Oswegatchie was dismantled by the Americans in 1806. This is the reason why there are Deer and Snipe Clan people living in the Oswegatchie territory, which is nestled in the St. Lawrence River valley. They are descendent of the Original Mohawks of the old French 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 Akwesasne was considered a "branch" of Kahnawake. (Blanchard 1983:2-22)

The Seven Nations of Canada

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 counterparts 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 farmed away.

In 1769, just before the British captured Oswegatchie, British forces in the form of Roger's Rangers raided Ogdan, a pre-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 Ogdan 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 cooperation. At a while later, Sir William Johnson, N. B. Hartell accompanied them from Ogdan, and his presence aggravated the French Governor's to grant in the first place, but as evidenced by the Abenaki incident, the lack of a documented title and the confusion brought about these migrations with Christian missions in the Mohawk Valley days. With the arrival of other Haudenosaunee at Akwesasne, it has been suggested that three more chieftains 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 at Akwesasne. The relic of Kateri Tekakwitha that accompanied the original settlers from Kahnawake. This church was quickly rebuilt that year. (Hough 1853:115) This was also the year that the deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs, Daniel Clion, began to suspect the newly arrived French priest, probably Father Antoine Gosselin (a Frenchman), of trying to stir up trouble against the French. It is not clear that his efforts were unsuccessful in rousing the passions of the war was wont to create. What was that, 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

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 provoked 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 deeming 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 counterparts 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 farmed away.

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 French 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 clash. It was a few of our own people who would lose the most.

Next Week:
A Nation Divided
The River Flows
Captain Joseph Brant and
Colonel L... is Cook