

## HISTORY

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York. Brother, this is what we agreed upon, that we should have councils and conversations together, of peace and unity.

Now brother, we beg that you will pay attention that you can take the matter into good consideration betwixt you and us. We have sent the bearers which will give you to understand our real minds and meaning, which is:

Thomas Aragrente,  
Thomas Tharagwanegen,  
Lumen Tiatoharongiven,  
William Gray,  
Atthi naton.

All the chiefs' compliments to you, and beg you will not let the bearers want for victuals or drink, as much as may be for their good.

Te gan ni tasen,  
Ona sa te gen,  
O na tri tsia wa ne,  
On wa ni en te ni,  
Sga na wa te,  
Tha na ha,  
Te ha sen,  
Sga hen to wa ro ne  
Tha ia iak ge,  
Si no he se,  
Tha hen teh tha,  
Sa ie gi sa ge ne,  
Ga ron ia ra gon.  
Ga ron ia tsi go wa."  
(Signed by their marks)

Ignored a second time, Colonel Louis and three of his comrades went back again in the winter of 1793-4 and were disappointed once more. A fourth trip in December 1794 achieved its goal: the governor appointed seven commissioners to hold an interview with the deputies, but they did not have authority to enter into treaty. Once the particulars of the case had been collected, legislation was passed to authorize a settlement of their claim and to provide money for the sustenance of the delegation during their stay. This act of legislation also empowered state agents to extinguish any other claims by native groups to land within New York. A meeting at Lake George was held in September of 1795, followed by more extensive negotiations in New York City in May of 1796. Attending this round of talks were Colonel Louis Cook, Thomas Williams (identified as a chief of Kahnawake), Ohnawio ("Good Stream," also listed as a chief from Kahnawake), and William Gray, as interpreter.

The 1796 treaty negotiations did not start off well. It appears from the accounts preserved in *A History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties* (1853) that the agents for New York questioned the authority of the deputies, since the document that they claimed bore the signatures of the full Seven Nations council could not be found—even though they insisted it had been given to George Washington for safekeeping. The state also rejected outright that the Seven Nations of Canada had any claim at all; did not the Mohawks of the Mohawk Valley lease as much as 800,000 acres of land without any consultation of their northern brethren? This last point angered the deputies.

"Brothers:

Had we several years ago, done as those have, whom you call a just people, that is; had we sold off all our lands, then; underhandedly sold our brothers, and then fled our country; took up arms and come and killed men, women, and children, indiscriminately: burnt houses and committed every other act of devastation, and in short, done everything we could, against our once nearest friends, then according to what you say of these Mohawks, you would have esteemed us a just people, and therefore would not have disputed our claim."

Still, the deputies made it clear that they were still open to a settlement of their claim: they were more than willing to accept a yearly annuity and "a small piece we wish to reserve for our own use." The agents responded by telling them the next day that while there was little evidence for their claim, they were willing to offer them \$3,000 as an act of friendship and "to avoid all controversy in the future." The six miles square reserved for them by Macomb, they said, was all they were willing to set aside for their use. This the delegation rejected. Their counter-proposal was for land

"to begin at the village of St. Regis, and to run east ten miles on the line of the latitude of forty-five, then up the River St. Lawrence, from the village of St. Regis to a place called the Presque Isle, which we think is about thirty-five or forty miles from the village, and that distance to continue twenty miles in breadth."

The agents for the state dismissed this suggestion outright, and continued to insist that there was ample evidence that no other native groups would recognize a Seven Nations claim, either. To prove it, they produced a copy of the 1787 Livingston Lease previously mentioned, which, although declared void by the state legislature, bore the signatures of chiefs of the Six Nations. Even though the deed was admittedly void,

"It is, notwithstanding, sufficient for the purpose for which we principally mention it, as it is not to be presumed, that these Indians would ever declare that lands which they intended to sell, and be paid for, as belonging to themselves, did belong to others."

The agents then reminded Colonel Louis that he himself was a witness to that deed, and surely would not have signed it if he knew of any other group with a claim to the land. They then stated that they were willing to offer a settlement similar to those offered to the Oneidas, Cayugas, and Onondagas out of good will only and added a yearly annuity payment to the previously offered sum.

The deputies retreated for a few days to discuss the revelation of Cook's



involvement in the Livingston Lease. They returned on the 28th of May to respond to the latest offer. William Gray, who did most of the speaking for the Seven Nations delegation, started off by attacking the "evidence" of the Livingston Lease.

"We have strictly examined Colonel (Louis) that was present when these purchases were made, of those nations, and he solemnly declares that he did not know of their selling any part of our lands, or any other, only (the) lands that belonged to them, and we take him to be a man of better principles, than to be a witness to so great a peice of misconduct against his own tribe, and then not to inform us of it before this time; we therefore must needs tell you, that we think there is a great deception in those deeds, as there has been in many other former purchases from our brother Indians, and to convince you, brothers, that we do not make an unjust demand; was it not for our poverty, we should not have requested you to have been at the expense of calling the different nations for witnesses between you and us, as we wish to convince you that we are a people that always have acted on honest principles, and mean to continue in doing the same."

Reminding the agents that "a nation or people without lands, are like rogues without friends," the deputies agreed to modify their claim to the following:

"Beginning at...the head of the second inland above Long Saut, on the River St. Lawrence, and run down the stream of the said river, ten miles below the village of St. Regis; then back into the woods twenty-ane (sic) miles, then westwardly in rear the same distance as in front, and from thence to the river, opposite to said island, to the place of beginning."

They also mentioned off the record that the

Indians of St. Regis operated mills on the Grass River and Salmon River which they would also like included in the settlement. The agents for New York considered this quite reasonable, and on May 31, 1796, a treaty was signed which contained these provisions. It set aside a mile square on both rivers, at the present location of Massena and Fort Covington, and a meadow along the Grass River used by Mohawk farmers, in addition to the six square miles as set aside in Macomb's purchase. The deputies were also given presents and compensation for their role in the negotiations which would be theirs to keep exclusive of the settlement or annuity for the rest of their tribe.

It is interesting to note that William Gray had been renting the land on the Salmon River from the chiefs of St. Regis since 1793. Within two years of the 1796 treaty the land (and mill) passed to James Robertson of Montreal. The mile square in Massena, where another mill had been in operation since 1792, was Colonel Louis' neighborhood.

### Enter Joseph Brant

As previously mentioned, New York's commissioners were empowered to extinguish any and all Indian claims to land

Purchase" which was declared null and void, like the previously mentioned "Livingston Lease," by the state legislature. Brant had witnessed the signatures of 66 chiefs, a fact he did not deny, but insisted that the land in question was nowhere near the territory claimed by the Seven Nations—it wasn't even in Oneida territory. Brant's witnessing of signatures did not necessarily imply that he was responsible for the contents of whatever it was that was being signed. Brant actually opposed these types of sales to the Americans and is quoted as having said in 1788:

"As for the Five Nations, most of them have sold themselves to the Devil--I mean to the Yankeys. Whatever they do after this is must be for the Yankeys—not for the Indians or the English." (Wallace 1969: 167)

Disgusted with the eagerness of Seneca leaders to part with their lands to the dishonest American government and businessmen, Brant and the Grand River Haudenosaunee began to drift apart from their "American" counterparts at this point. As for the Seven Nations of Canada, Brant considered them ancient outcasts and denied that they had claim to the same territory as the Mohawks of Grand River and Bay of Quinte.

Brant demanded that the accusers present their evidence to the Grand Council at Buffalo Creek, but they insisted that he come to Kahnawake where the Seven Nations held their Grand Councils. He refused. He wrote letters to American government officials such as Thomas Morris, a member of the New York legislature, and Governors George Clinton and John Jay, asking them for information to help clear up the misunderstanding.

Unsatisfied with the responses, he sent his half-Indian assistant and nephew John Norton and a group of Cayuga chiefs to Albany in 1799 to procure copies of treaties and negotiation transcripts. They were met in Albany by a similar delegation from the Seven Nations, but the dispute was still left unresolved by the time the visit was concluded.

Later that year a Grand Council at Kahnawake was called. Even Sir John Johnson attended, so critical was peace between the two confederacies. Brant went with a support group of chiefs from a variety of tribes; he was determined to settle the matter once and for all.

### The Seven Nations Grand Council of 1799

Brant's account of the meeting, found in the *Collections of the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society*, Volume 20 (1892), is the only account that we know exists. It began with a traditional greeting by the Seven Nations to the Five Nations:

"The road which our ancestors had made for our Brethren to walk in, on the business of peace, has got encumbered with many fallen Trees, and bushes have grown up therein so as to make it almost imperceptible, we are therefore happy that you have now beat the path again so as to make it plain.

Brothers,

On every turn along the road there is birds telling Stories, our ancestors ordered that such things not be listened to, but be cast behind our backs, let us therefore Brethren do as our Forefathers commanded."

An American-based Oneida delegate got right down to business in regard to the "story-telling birds."

"Brothers:

I have a few words to speak to you on the part of the Chiefs at Oneida...they have been convincing the Story-telling Birds, which have been saying that the Oneidas had best not attend the Council at Caughnawaga as they had been on the American side during the late war, that they would certainly meet with bad treatment if they went there, I was therefore Brothers desired by the Chiefs of the Oneidas to ask you, how that is, if it is so or not, the bird was heard at several places and wanted to stop us from coming here, and his name is Col. Louis."

The narrative then states that

"The Chief of the Caughnawagas then said it might have originated at St. Regis but that he hoped his brothers the Oneidas would pay no attention to it for that he would

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