

same in every respect, although they are now preparing to contend. We are ignorant of the real motives which urge them to arm, but we are well assured that we have no interest therein, and that neither one nor other have any affection toward us. We know that our Blood shed in their Battles will not even ensure their compassion to our Widows and Orphans, - nor respect to our Tribes weakened in their Contests. Has not our Nation partaken in ev'ry War in which the English have been engaged, - since they first joined hands, (for then the English and Americans were one). In standing between them and the French, many a Valiant Warrior has fallen. But although we have thus been weakened, and deprived of our Independence, it has not been by the Victories of a Conqueror; - it has been the neglect or Unkindness of our Friends. Seeing therefore, that no good can be derived from War, we think we should only seek the surest means of averting its attendant Evils: We are of opinion that we should follow the example of some of their people, who never bear arms in war, and deprecate the principle of hostility." (Blanchard 1980:305-306)

Thus the Haudenosaunee as a whole resisted the efforts of the British government to recruit their men into military service. This neutrality would remain in effect as long as their territories were not invaded.

The War of 1812 saw activity along the western frontier, the Great Lakes, and the St. Lawrence River. Akwesasne, because of its location on the international border and the St. Lawrence River, faced an uncertain future when rumors of war began to reach Mohawk ears. The American authorities became fearful that the coming war would unleash destructive war parties against white settlers near Akwesasne, so they demanded that any native traveling off the reserve carry a paper pass designating that they were "peaceable." They were also prohibited from hunting off the reserve. The threat of starvation brought pleas from Colonel Louis Cook for assistance from the American authorities. Some of these provisions were shared with the Mohawks living north of the border. It is recorded that some of these provisions were shared out of kindness with the priest at St. Regis, but this aroused the suspicions of the British authorities that the priest was accepting bribes from the Americans. Historians also note that a black market in smuggled American food and supplies began during the war, as British troops in Cornwall were poorly supplied by the Crown.

#### The Battle at St. Regis

Before the conflict began, English and American authorities agreed that Akwesasne would remain neutral in the war. This was not to be. As many as 80 warriors were recruited from Akwesasne to fight for the British in the summer of 1812. While they were gone, the British stationed a detachment of troops at Akwesasne for a brief time in the fall, violating the neutrality agreed upon by the British and the Americans. These troops were mostly French Canadian voyageurs from Montreal. One would assume that they set up their command post within the Catholic Church's fortified stone walls. Not long after the garrison arrived, William Gray guided a small force of American troops from French Mills (present-day Fort Covington, New York) to the eastern shore of the St. Regis River, opposite the British garrison, but they were unable to cross the river. Major Guilfred Dudley Young and his troops returned a few days later and crossed the river by raft at Gray's Mills (Hogansburg), then proceeded north to St. Regis. Accounts vary on what happened when they arrived the next morning. One says the garrison was taken with three killed, 25 captured, and without the British firing a single shot in their defense. Another says the British lost as many as eight men in combat and 23 were taken prisoner. Yet another says five were killed and 40 taken prisoner; still another gives the number killed as four. Immediately following the battle, the American troops ransacked the homes of the natives, seized their possessions, and arrested the missionary, Father Jean Baptiste Roupe. The victorious Americans later marched a captured British flag through the streets of Albany to celebrate, but the British successfully launched an attack of their own against French Mills not long thereafter. It is recorded that a band of Mohawks from Kanesatake and Akwesasne took part in this battle. (Hough 1853:156-157; Sellar 1888:68-71; Wilder 1987:9)

#### Mohawk Involvement in the War

The Mohawks who left Akwesasne to fight

in the war were stationed at Kingston during the taking of Little York. Thirty were present in the advance on Ogdensburg in February of 1813. Twenty saw action at Sackett's Harbor near Alexandria Bay in May of that same year. Some were stationed in Cornwall during the battle at Chrysler's field but did not fight. (Hough 1853:156) In October of 1813, a force of 350 Mohawks from Kanesatake and Kahnawake, along with French and British forces under Colonel Charles de Salaberry, prevented an American force 4000 strong from attacking Montreal. A combined force of Kanesatake, Kahnawake, Akwesasne, and Six Nations Mohawks proved to be the decisive factor in the "British" victory at the Battle of Beaver Dam in 1813. One account of this particular battle was given in a book called *The War With The United States*:

"All the thickets, woods, creeks, and swamps, were closely beset by a body of expert persistent Indians who gradually increased from two hundred and fifty to four hundred men. They were all in excellent touch with each other. Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, who commanded them, generously acknowledged that 'not a shot was fired on our side by any but the Indians. They beat the American detachment into a state of terror.'"

Major John Norton gave his own assessment of the battle in his journal:

"...the Cognawaga Indians fought the battle, the Mohawks (of Six Nations) got the plunder, and General Fitzgibbon got all the credit." (Blanchard 1980:308)

#### The Battle of Chippawa

The fortunes of our fellow Mohawks at the Grand River following the Battle of Beaver Dam deserves to be told here. These men served under Major John Norton, the late Joseph Brant's "successor," and had successfully defended Canada from an American invasion earlier in the war. Across the border, the Americans were pressuring the Tuscaroras to serve in their army. They sent a delegation to Canada to see if their northern brothers would hurt them if they crossed the rivers with the American forces; they were told by an Onondaga Chief:

"This will depend on yourselves. If you take no part with the Americans we shall meet you with the same friendship as we ever did, and we look for the day when you shall see our forces on your side of the water. We have no contention with you. It is the King and the Americans, and we have taken part with the King. We will contend for his rights."

Later on, when the Tuscaroras did engage on the side of the Americans, the Haudenosaunee of Grand River released themselves of the promise not to attack them. Five days later the Tuscaroras joined an American force from Fort Niagara in an attack on the Canadian Indians in the vicinity of Fort Erie, Ontario.

In July of 1814 an American force under General Jacob Brown with about 500 Senecas under Red Jacket took possession of Fort Erie and then turned toward Chippawa and Fort George. They encountered a British force that contained 300 Indians, 200 of which were from Six Nations. These men quickly advanced upon the American line, far ahead of the British troops, and came close to capturing an

American officer who immediately turned and ran in the opposite direction. The Indians, following right into a large contingent of the Americans, were forced to retreat. The carnage that ensued between the American and Canadian Indians was particularly gruesome:

"A rush accompanied with savage yells (was) made upon them and continued for more than a mile, through scenes of frightful havoc and slaughter, a few only of the fugitives offering to surrender as prisoners, while others believing that no quarter would be given, suffered themselves to be cut down with the tomahawk, or turning back on their pursuers fought hard to the last." (Stanley 1963: 228)

This battle was rather insignificant to the main combatants, but to their Haudenosaunee allies it was devastating. 87 Canadian Indians were killed and 5 were taken prisoner. The American Indians lost 9 men; 4 were wounded and 10 were missing. The Senecas looked sadly upon the bodies of their fallen brothers. Before long the two sides agreed to resume their previous stance of neutrality, much to the chagrin of their non-native allies (who rarely appreciated their efforts anyway.)

#### The Last Years of Cook and Gray

The War of 1812 saw further pro-American military activity by Colonel Cook, who was by then a man in his seventies. When some Kahnawake Mohawks and their British allies were captured by the Americans at Fort George in 1813, he went to Niagara to negotiate for their release. He was arrested as a spy by the Americans, then released with full exoneration when he presented his credentials and letters of recommendation written by George Washington and other American military leaders. In the fall of 1814, Cook fell from his horse while leading a party of Tuscarora warriors in engagements against the British and Indians previously mentioned. He died soon after and was buried with honors near Buffalo, New York. William Gray, who led the American forces to St. Regis in 1812, was captured by the enemy in December of 1813 and died in a Quebec prison in the spring of 1814. Thomas Williams, another of their associates, is said to have been active in the war as well but he survived his friends and lived to a ripe old age.

#### The End of the War of 1812

The War of 1812 came to an end with a stalemate of sorts. Great Britain was worn out by the wars against both France and the United States, and the Americans realized that with the defeat of Napoleon in Europe, England would be able to turn its full attention and resources to the conflict in North America. The Treaty of Ghent, signed in 1814 and ratified by the United States early in 1815, effectively ended the war, although a British general later led an attack of 500 ships against New Orleans because he hadn't heard about the treaty. Territory each country held before the war was returned. Although the Americans were unable to drive Great Britain from North America as they might have hoped, their major victories caused an upsurge in nationalism that practically guaranteed their westward expansion in the years that followed.

For the natives that stood in the way of that expansion, the end of the war saw their abandonment by their ally Great Britain. Akwesasne Mohawks, who fought

valiantly for both sides in the war, found their community bitterly divided in its aftermath. The spirit of Mohawk unity had once again met its match in the passions of war, and non-native authorities wasted no time setting these divisions in stone with acts of legislation.

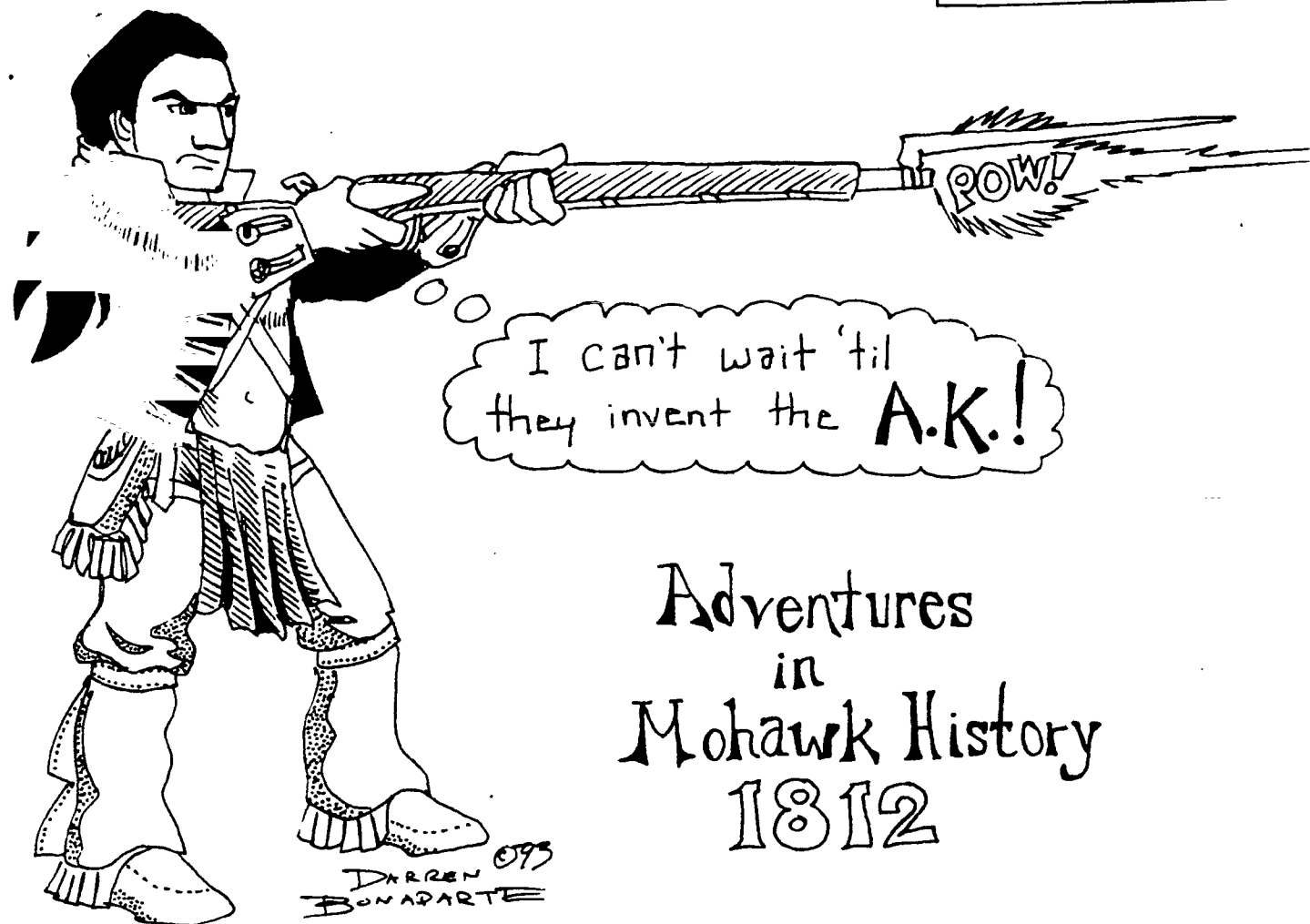
#### The Rise of the Chief Warriors

It wasn't long before Loren Tarbell, the surviving trustee, appointed two old life chiefs, Peter Tarbell and Jacob Francis, to fill the vacancies left by Cook and Gray. New York passed an act in 1818 recognizing these appointments. In a treaty meeting with the Governor of New York in 1824, a group calling themselves the "chief warriors of the tribe of American St. Regis Indians" petitioned New York to appoint Thomas Williams, Lewis Doublehouse, Mitchell Cook, and Peter Tarbell as trustees. These men, along with later appointees Charles Cook, Thomas Tarbell, Louis Tarbell, Battice Tarbell, Jarvis Williams, and William L. Gray (the son of the deceased William Gray) were signatories to a series of land sales that further diminished Akwesasne territory.

Before the War of 1812, annuities from the Seven Nations of Canada Treaty of 1796 were dispersed to residents of both Akwesasne and Kahnawake, but when it was over only "American" Mohawks at Akwesasne received payment. British authorities stopped paying rental annuities to the Mohawks who had supported the United States or remained neutral during the conflict. They refused to allow anyone but "British" Mohawks to settle north of the border. The violence that erupted between these factions prompted some of the "Loyalist" Mohawks to evacuate their homes in St. Regis and settle on islands closest to the British garrison in Cornwall. When they finally returned to their former properties around 1822, they were constantly harassed and treated with "every possible mark of obloquy and Scorn" by their patriotic American neighbors. Some of their properties had been destroyed, others had been completely taken over by pro-Americans, who added insult to injury by parading American flag and saluting the stars and stripes with the firing of a cannon procured in Fort Covington. This conflict prevented the chiefs from collecting rent for previous land leases to white settlers. (NAC RG10 v. 625 pp. 182, 238-182, 555)

In an effort to firmly establish their independence from any obligation to the British Crown, the American-based "Chief Warriors" submitted a signed document dated May 31, 1824 to the governor of New York that read as follows:

"Know all whom it may concern, that we, whose names are hereto annexed, do solemnly declare ourselves, to belong to the American Tribe of St. Regis Indians, that we owe no fealty to the British government, nor receive any annuities or benefits from the same; that we are friendly to the United States during the late war, and have continued to be so since, and that it is our fixed determination, to establish and continue our residence within the limits of the said United States, the protection and countenance, and especially of the state of New York, we hereby claim for said tribe. In witness of all which we have hereto caused our names and seals to be affixed this 31st day of May, in the year 1824, within our reservation lands, in the



## Adventures in Mohawk History 1812