

state of New York, done in duplicate one copy to be kept by our chiefs, and one copy to be delivered to the governor of the state of New York."

This document was signed by sixty natives, probably family members of the "Chief Warriors." With legal recognition from the state of New York, this faction of Akwesasne Mohawks were then in a position to sell 840 acres of land south of the village of Hogansburg, which they promptly did. In time the mile square in Massena, and the meadows leading to it, were also sold off by this group. (The mile square in Fort Covington had been sold off by the Trustees in 1816.)

Relations between Akwesasne and Kahnawake were strained by these new land sales and by the refusal of American authorities to pay anyone but the American Mohawks the annuities of the Seven Nations of Canada Treaty of 1796. Payment was eventually resumed, but only after considerable lobbying by the Kahnawake Mohawks and their allies on the Canadian side of Akwesasne. The legal wrangling over the annuities marks a low point in the history of the Seven Nations Confederacy. It also marked the emergence of a new political entity on the Haudenosaunee stage: the American Tribe of St. Regis Indians, an entity which survives to this day, albeit under a different name.

Initial research in this era suggests that the life chief council at Akwesasne was just as split by the international border as the rest of the community. The Tarbell family had been dominant in Akwesasne politics since the start of the mission in the 1750's; this prominence continued on the American side well into modern times. In time the Canadian faction would raise up new life chiefs to take the place of the breakaway Americans. This Canada-based Council of Life Chiefs would derive its authority from tradition, but it held no real membership in any confederation or league and very little is known about it today.

A Mohawk Meets the Pope

The early nineteenth century brought con artists out of the woodwork to take advantage of native communities, and Akwesasne was no exception. In 1826, Chief Joseph Tarbell, or Torakaron, accompanied a young Frenchman named Fovel to Europe for a meeting with King Charles X of France, where he so impressed the monarch that he was given three paintings of Christian saints, a large sum of money, and other gifts. They then proceeded to Rome for an interview with Pope Leo XII, who was similarly impressed and gave Torakaron a set of books, a rosary of jewels, a silver plate, quantities of gold, and other valuables. When Fovel and Torakaron returned to America in 1828, Fovel absconded with most of the valuables, leaving Torakaron penniless in New York City with only the paintings and rosary to show for his troubles. (Hough 1853:166) One of the paintings, that of Saint Regis, can still be seen at the Catholic Church today.

Dark Days for Akwesasne

As if events of this era of Akwesasne history weren't bad enough, the impoverished condition of the Mohawks made them an ideal target for the scourge of imported disease. Poor weather conditions in 1813 and 1816 caused famine in various parts of the world, and Akwesasne was not spared the deadly effects of hunger. Small pox, the dreadful disease that killed off scores of our ancestors, made a return appearance in the spring of 1829 and claimed a number of lives before the British government ordered a community-wide immunization. In 1832 Asiatic cholera and typhus fever broke out, killing at least 134 of the 500 victims. The fear of these diseases drove family members to abandon their homes, leaving the sick to perish unattended. One family in particular lost all but one of its eleven members. The panic spread to neighboring towns, and for a brief time a quarantine was imposed to stop the spread of disease, consisting mostly of a volunteer guard on the road to Hogansburg.

Cholera swept Akwesasne once again in 1849, killing 29. It was followed in the same year by another outbreak of small pox that claimed 30 of the 500 afflicted. Typhus fever raged once again in the summer of the following year. The ravages of these diseases left the survivors in a weakened and fearful state, to say the least. (Hough 1853:167-168)

The Mohawks and the Patriote Rebellion

Although the Mohawks of Akwesasne and other communities steadfastly maintained their independence from their non-native neighbors, we have seen that political upheavals among the non-natives often spread over to the Mohawks. One such incident was the Patriote Rebellion of the late 1830's. Both Akwesasne and Kahnawake were drawn into this conflict between the dominant British government and the increasingly militant French nationalists of Quebec.

When the British conquered New France in 1759, they agreed to allow the French Canadians to maintain their own language, schools, court system, and religion. By 1822, however, the British decided to unify Upper and Lower Canada (Ontario and Quebec) and have one parliament pass laws governing them in the English language. This angered a man named Louis Joseph Papineau, who led the fight to protect the rights of the French as specified under the Articles of Capitulation. The people who joined his movement came to be known as *Les Patriotes*.

Tensions began to mount in 1832 when British troops fired into a crowd at an election in Montreal, killing three men. The outraged Patriotes responded by drafting a formal protest and demanded a more democratic government that respected French cultural sovereignty. Meanwhile, they began to gather like-minded forces together under the name Sons of Liberty for open rebellion against the British.

In December of 1837, after a couple of battles between the Patriote rebels and British forces at St. Denis and St. Charles, a

large force of Kahnawake Mohawks paddled across the St. Lawrence to join forces with the British Lachine Brigade. Rumors had been circulating that the Patriotes were planning to capture the arms and ammunition stores of the Hudson's Bay Company at Lachine where many Mohawks were employed, but the attack never materialized. An eyewitness described the sight of the Mohawks as they approached Lachine:

"What a cheering sight it was there.—The river was literally covered with canoes; every warrior in Caughnawaga was crossing to join the Lachine Brigade. A cheer of welcome from the little band of volunteers greeted the arrival of the Indian warriors, and their wild war whoop in response was a sound, a sight and a scene the likes of which will never be heard or seen again in this province." (Blanchard 1980:316-318)

In Akwesasne, however, dissent was brewing about what side the Mohawks should support. Because of their close proximity to the British in Cornwall, most of the chiefs wanted to support the Crown. Torakaron, or Joseph Tarbell, the same Mohawk chief who went to Europe to meet the King of France and the pope in 1826, strongly supported the Patriotes because of their close association with the Roman Catholics of Quebec. Captain George Phillpotts of the Royal Engineers reported to Sir John Colborne, the man in charge of suppressing the rebellion, that the deposed Torakaron had made an impassioned speech in support of Papineau and declared:

"Papineau is fighting for the liberty of the Roman Catholics and the King is fighting against it—that he (would) join Papineau, and the first use he (would) make of his protection (would) be to shoot the old fool, his head chief."

Another Mohawk agreed with him, saying he felt

"strong in the cause of Papineau, as did all the other warriors except the chiefs, who were sworn slaves to the King."

Phillpotts also noted rumors that Torakaron had threatened to blow up government ammunition stores at Akwesasne.

Phillpotts' fears were unfounded: the Mohawks supported the British forces with food and loaned them a ceremonial field cannon left over from the War of 1812. In November of 1838 a force of 50 Akwesasne men joined British forces from the Cornwall area in a campaign against the rebels camped at Baker's Farm on the Chateauguay River near Ste. Martine, but their war cries caused the Patriotes to abandon their position before the combined force of Mohawks, Stormont Highlanders, and Huntingdon Volunteers arrived to do battle. (Senior 1984:135-144)

A few days earlier, 64 Patriotes armed with pikes, clubs, and sticks left the village of Chateauguay with plans to capture arms

and ammunition being stored in Kahnawake. An old Mohawk woman was looking for a lost cow that morning and saw the Patriotes advancing on the road from Chateauguay; she hurried back to the village in time to warn 40 men gathered at the St. John the Baptist Chapel. They armed themselves with muskets and prepared an ambush for the Patriotes. When the would-be attackers neared the village, they were confronted by the Mohawks and immediately surrendered. The Mohawks turned them over to the British authorities in Montreal and were alarmed when informed that the leaders of the Chateauguay Patriotes were to be executed for treason. They wrote a letter to the British, appealing for their lives:

"They did us no harm. They did not shed the blood of our brethren. Why shed theirs? The services which we rendered His Majesty and those which we will not hesitate to render in the future, give us the hope that our prayer will find its way to the heart of Your Excellency."

This had little effect on the British, who went ahead with the hangings anyway to intimidate the Patriotes who still had some fight left in them. With the threat of future Patriote assaults on their village still hanging over them, the Kahnawake Mohawks joined the Lachine Brigade in an assault on Chateauguay to rout the last of the Patriotes, but the rebels fled by the time the Kahnawake/Lachine forces arrived. The angry Lachine Brigade began to burn homes, pillage, and attack innocent people, but it was the Mohawks who were initially blamed for the atrocities. Finally, as thanks for their help in putting down the rebellion, the British offered to make the Mohawks of Kahnawake full British citizens with the right to vote, but they settled for the building of a school instead. (Blanchard 1980:318-322)

Snakes for Allies

Akwesasne's fighting men returned to their homes after the war and resumed the farming and hunting that they left behind, confident that their assistance to the residents of nearby Cornwall had earned them their respect. The French serpent's rebellion had been put down and the wounded creature was licking its wounds once again, far from dead but definitely out of action for some time to come.

The victorious English serpent, not uncharacteristically, quickly forgot the promises made to its native allies. In the coming decades it would give birth to a new serpent, the nation of Canada, and slither back to its place of origin, confident that its child would protect its inheritance with honor. Unfortunate for Britain's native allies, the new serpent, like its American older brother, ignored the treaties made by its parent and betrayed her allies with impunity. This ensured that the Mohawks and Haudenosaunee within Canada's borders would have to carve out a new peace and a new relationship in the generations to come.

Next Week:  
The Civil War  
and Other Near  
Conflicts



Kanonhkwa'tsherio  
(MCA SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT & HEALTH DEPARTMENT)

Programs

Social Development & Health Admin.  
St. Regis Drug & Alcohol Division  
Mohawk Council Ambulance Unit  
Community Health Representatives  
Akwesasne Dental Clinic  
Community Health Nurses  
Home Support  
Home Care  
Akwesasne Child & Family Services  
Social Community Services

575-2341  
575-1163  
575-2161  
575-2411  
575-1157  
575-2570  
575-2009  
575-2716  
575-2015  
575-2280

Akwesasne Medical Clinic  
Community Counselling Program  
Optometry  
Iakhihsongtha-Home for the Elderly  
Ion kwa nonhsa setsi Adolescent Home  
le thi nis ten:ha Violence Shelter  
O non kwa son a Pharmacy  
Akwesasne Child Care Program  
Kanatakon Child Care Centre  
Tsi snaihne Child Care Centre  
Kawehnoke Child Care Centre

575-2020  
575-1175  
575-1158  
575-2507  
932-5050  
937-4322  
575-1160  
575-1161  
575-1162  
575-1171  
938-5067