

In the last part of this work we saw how the ancient Mohawk *Prophecy of the Silver and Gold Serpents* symbolized the precarious relationship our ancestors tried to maintain amid the clash of colonial powers in North America. We left off with the return of our Mohawk men from the Patriote Rebellion in Quebec. The symbolic French serpent had "reawakened" for a time and lashed out at its new British "master," the result being an outbreak of hostilities that caused considerable alarm for the Mohawks who lived in harm's way, particularly at Kahnawake. The rebellion was put down with Mohawk help. In fact, sometimes just the *threat* of Mohawk help was enough to achieve victory. Either way, the serpent was defeated though not entirely destroyed. The last remnants of our love/hate relationship with the Great Onontio, "The Man On The Mountain" (our name for the King of France), were at that point quickly slipping into oblivion.

Our men returned home to resume their lives and rejoin their families. To burn off the rest of their adrenaline, they probably organized a few days of *Tewaarathon*, or lacrosse, and gave thanks that their casualties on the battlefield were few. Not long after that they resumed their fishing, hunting and gardening. Some of them went to work in the Adirondack logging camps, others sought work piloting boats through the tumultuous rapids of the St. Lawrence River, and a few even sought adventure in the West as fur trappers and voyageurs. Our Mohawk women continued to do what it is they usually did in times of war and peace: everything else.

This relatively peaceful era saw Akwesasne recover a great deal of the strength it had lost in generations of war and epidemics. It also saw an increase in day-to-day interaction with European immigrants moving into the region. It was not uncommon for a Mohawk to adopt the family name of a new friend in those days, nor were inter-marriages out of the ordinary. The oral tradition tells us that native people often took in orphans and abandoned children and raised them as their own. With an increase in contact came inevitable pressure to learn the English language, something that a minority of our people had adopted, even at this late period in post-contact history.

Mohawk culture ritualized the adoption of new members into the nation, be they native or European. When someone was adopted, they were considered to be Mohawk from then on. Assimilation into the dominant Mohawk culture was complete: adopted Hurons among the Haudenosaunee actually went to war against their own people in the 1600's. Historians have noted that some white captives chose not to leave their new homes when presented with the choice. The same could not be said, however, for many of the natives who lived among the whites: within the first week, they would usually leave their European-style clothing hanging in a tree and run home naked.

As we have seen, Akwesasne history offers us three examples of adoptions that stand out: Eunice Williams, captured in Deerfield, Massachusetts in 1704; and the Tarbell boys, John and Zechariah, taken from Groton, Massachusetts in 1707. Many of their descendants held positions of leadership in Akwesasne, just as the Tarbells did when the St. Regis Mission was established here in 1755, and contact with their New England relatives was maintained through subsequent generations.

One captive's descendant in particular never did quite come to grips with his mixed heritage. His identity crisis reached symbolic proportions, even to the point where he began to claim that he was the long-lost heir to the throne of the King of France. For this reason he is more than just a historical oddity. He is a symbol of failed assimilation into both native and non-native society, a true "Lost Prince" if there ever was one. His name was Eleazer Williams.

Eleazer Williams

Eleazer Williams was the son of Trustee Thomas Williams and the great-grandson of the "unredeemed captive," Eunice Williams. Although the history of his life was the subject of debate even while he lived, a portrait emerges of someone highly intelligent, ambitious, and deeply embarrassed by his Mohawk background. He was not above doctoring the details of his ancestry and personal history to impress the non-native society to which he aspired, both as a member of the clergy and as a contender to the throne of France.

Eleazer was born around 1788. No record of his birth appeared in the church records at Kahnawake where the Williams family normally lived, so it is hard to say for sure when exactly he was born. He may have been born at his family's summer camp near Lake George, which would explain why it wasn't registered with his many brothers

Land Where The Partridge Drums

A History of the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation

The King Without a Crown

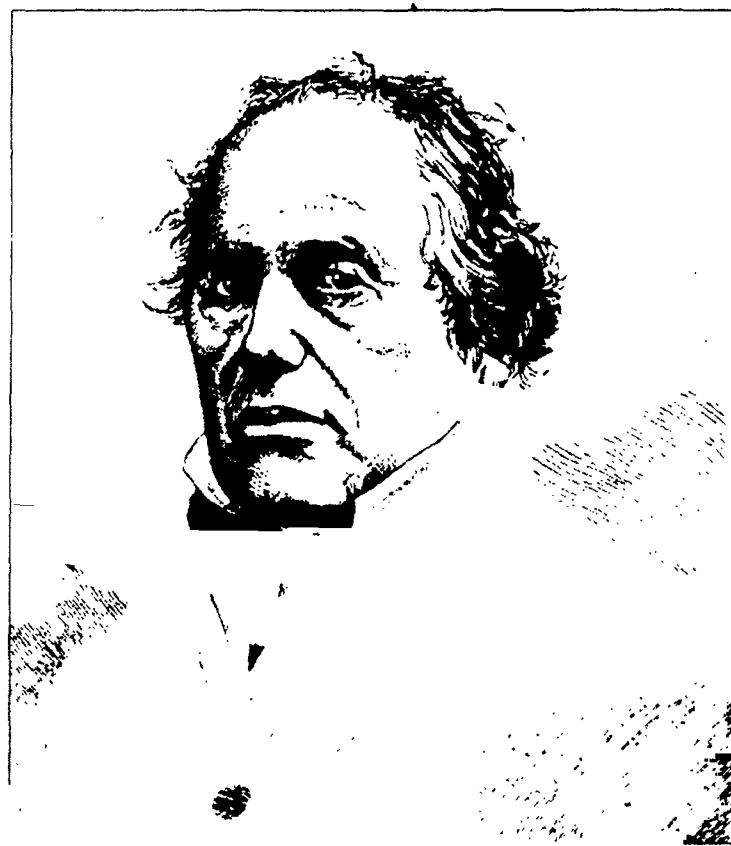
by Darren Bonaparte

and sisters. Of itself, this concern seems trivial, but sixty-five years later the mysterious birth date of Eleazer Williams became a serious concern (and a major waste of time) to many important people, the reasons for which we will get into shortly.

The adolescent Eleazer and his brother John were sent to Longmeadow, Massachusetts, to live with the Deacon Nathaniel Ely, a relative of the family of Eleazer's great-grandmother, Eunice Williams. He excelled in his religious studies and impressed the Protestant elite so much that he felt that they were grooming him for the pulpit and (in those days) the highest levels of New England society. In reality, his Congregational sponsors probably never seriously considered such a thing, since colonial society was caste-like and would never allow an Indian (redeemed captive or not) to ascend his "lot in life." The naive Williams, who identified himself more with his relatives in Massachusetts than his own Mohawk people, must have been mortified

number of traditionalists to the Episcopal Church. Oneida at the time was divided by religious and political factionalism; this situation was further complicated by external pressures to relocate west to Wisconsin. Williams' ambitions were satisfied with the powerful role as intermediary between the Oneidas and the external forces: namely, the powerful Ogden Land Company (which sought the valuable Oneida territory) and the governments of New York and the United States.

Although he established a church at Oneida and translated Christian texts into Haudenosaunee languages, his missionary successes were overshadowed by his involvement in the purchase of Menominee and Winnebago land in 1821. This sale was rejected by the remaining traditionalists and the faction of Christians converted prior to Williams' arrival, and they sought to have him recalled. His Episcopalian faction approved of migration to Wisconsin but were less than satisfied about the deal itself. Williams, who may have been a paid



(Catherine Welch, *The Little Dauphin* - Metropolitan Toronto Library Board)

when Deacon Ely sent him to Moor's Charity School in Hanover, New Hampshire, to continue his studies with other young natives. He stayed only a week, and left fully attired.

In 1811 Williams went to Akwesasne, where his father and siblings then lived. Although he fancied himself on a mission to convert the Mohawks to the Protestant faith, there is little evidence that his sponsors sent him there for any other reason than to absolve themselves of their obligations to him. His "mission," if real, may have simply been a sugar-coating for his departure. Shortly after arriving in Akwesasne, he converted to Episcopalianism and often accompanied the Trustees on their yearly sojourn to Plattsburgh for annuity money.

By Williams' personal accounts, he followed his father's lead during the War of 1812 and supported the Americans. He claimed to have been a lieutenant colonel (and then a full colonel) in General Dearborn's army, a negotiator with the British, a secret intelligence agent, and superintendent general of Indian Affairs for the northern frontier, none of which has ever been substantiated by other sources, according to at least one modern historian, Thomas Buerger. Williams even went so far as to take credit for the victory at the Battle of Plattsburgh, claiming that the vanity of the American generals in charge prevented them from documenting his achievements.

Williams in Oneida

Following the war he moved to Oneida, where he found considerable success as a bilingual missionary and converted a

Williams returned to Akwesasne and attempted to establish a mission, but this was largely a failure by 1848. He was by then an old man with little money and no credibility, all of which he blamed on his native heritage. He told a genealogist working on a history of the Williams family that his great-grandmother Eunice had married an English physician who had also been taken captive by the Kahnawake Mohawks. This attempt to add yet another prestigious white forebear to his pedigree would not be the last time Williams tried to deny his Mohawk ancestry.

The Lost Dauphin

In 1853 an article in *Putnam's Magazine* appeared under the title of "Have We A Bourbon Among Us?" in which author John H. Hanson described his chance meeting with Williams on a trip to New England. Hanson had read an earlier magazine article that proclaimed Williams as the "Lost Dauphin," or Louis XVII, son and heir to the French throne. Hanson accepted Williams' claim as fact and went on to document the "proof" offered by Williams. According to the romantic account, the Dauphin had not died in the Temple following the French Revolution, but was spirited away by royalist agents and taken to America, where he was turned over to Thomas Williams of Kahnawake to raise as his own.

Hanson wrote a book to further document the claim, *The Lost Prince*, in which he offered a number of documents, some of them alleged forgeries written by Eleazer Williams himself, as evidence. Williams went so far as to coerce or deceive his mother (who only spoke Mohawk) to sign an affidavit claiming that he was not her real son. Hanson went after Williams' critics with vehemence and vigorously attacked the character of Father Francis Marcoux, the Roman Catholic priest who sought to set the record straight with regard to the testimony of Williams' elderly mother.

Probably the most damaging evidence against Williams' claim was the testimony of an associate in Wisconsin who claimed that it was he who put the notion into Eleazer's head by writing a short story about the Lost Dauphin in which Eleazer was cast as the secret prince. He loaned the story to Williams, purely for entertainment purposes, and was shocked to find that the missionary had taken the fanciful tale to heart when he read the article in *Putnam's Magazine*.

The Lost Dauphin affair, while attracting publicity to Williams in the final years of his life, did little to improve his lot. He spent his last years collecting his personal papers and writing a biography of his father, who died in 1848. Williams himself died in poverty in 1858. It has been argued by one historian that the failed "Lost Dauphin" campaign, while perfectly in character for the charlatan Williams, has only served to overshadow the real achievements in his life, such as his establishment of two churches among the Oneida. Yet it is his claim to the throne of France that has earned him a place in history, even to the point of being immortalized by Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn* as "Looey the Seventeen...the wanderin', exiled, trampled-on, and sufferin' rightful King of France." A novel, two plays, and a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer short film, *King Without a Crown* (1937), have been based on his claim. (Buerger 1989:112-136)

In 1947 his remains were exhumed from his grave in Hogsburg and reburied at Green Bay. St. James Episcopal Church, which was built in the 1830's at the expense of local politician and landowner William Hogan, was eventually used to store hay before it finally burned down. Today only the stone foundation is visible. (Another was built in 1874, but it was destroyed by fire in 1961.) Williams' elegant A-frame cottage, built west of the church by his Episcopal supporters, still stands today. It was rebuilt by a private citizen in the late

1980's and continues to attract the attention of curious visitors who have heard the tale of the "Lost Dauphin." Eleazer Williams, the mixed-blood preacher with delusions of grandeur and near contempt for the Mohawk part of his heritage, has been a permanent fixture of northern New York folklore for generations. Some would even argue that if it weren't for Eleazer Williams, the folklore of northern New York wouldn't even exist.

Due to space limitations, we are unable to include the chapter on the Civil War and other matters from the mid-1800's as promised last week. Look for it in the new year.

Our Resident Cranky Mohawk Historian, Darren Bonaparte, hopes you have a merry Christmas and a happy new year. If you don't, he doesn't want to hear about it.