

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

August 2024, Issue 327

Garth—Iroquois Confederation

Another warm August evening brought out a crowd: Harriet & Art Marini, Terry & Garth Bryant, Linda & George Soldner, Buddy Soldner, Valerie White, Stephanie Ingalls, Victoria Kraker, Steven Snyder, Lorrie & Tom Spinner, Lew Knott, Linda Singer Berger, Eileen & Ed Volmar, David Tschinkel, Kathy Maggio, John Earl, Tony Trimarchi, Jeff Pellerin, Richard Ceasar, Judy & David Spring, Maryann Morrison, Susan & Peter Keitel, Roger Morey, Jane Masterson & Stewart Wagner, Joe Snyder, Bob Shaw, Louise Schindler, Anita Orsino, Donna Kropp, Flip Flach, Brian Mulligan, Christine Mickelsen, Johanne & Robert Titus, Jack Van Auken, Debra & Don Teator, three not-quite-legibles (to my uncertain eyes), and a likely handful who escaped notice of both my sign-in sheet and my memory cells. A dozen and a half chairs from the other room were needed this evening. Whew!

Garth Bryant

The Iroquois Confederation

Of course, the crowd was inspired by both Garth and by the topic of the Iroquois.

The intriguing part, once news of the evening's topic was announced, was our reactions. Everyone knows the Iroquois. And then one sits back and ticks off the facts we know. And most of us ran out after two!

One, of course, was of the savages who marauded the Mohawk Valley and even nearby. They settled nowhere and seemed to be everywhere.

The other one, quite contradictory to the first one, is of three women in a domestic poses with the three sisters – corn, squash, beans – being tended to.

OK, add a third one, for those of us who took the GCS field trip to the State Museum or State Ed Building, was the presentation of the longhouse.

A couple of us had been to the Iroquois Museum out Schoharie-Howes Cave area.

And so, Garth was primed to debunk another of our cherished views that might have needed, or did need, fuller content.

A thank you first to Garth for allowing access to his slideshow from which I have borrowed heavily.

Garth's premise for the program was both familiar in memory but also a cautionary that he had more to tell than most of us could recall:

When the first European settlers came to upstate New York there was a powerful Indian Nation living here. They were the Iroquois, a confederation of five tribes. They had developed a system of representative government where each tribe had a vote in tribal decisions that was unlike anything else in the New World. We will explore how over the next 200 years the Iroquois interactions with the Europeans would lead them to their greatest heights of power but ultimately almost total destruction in New York State.

And in a quick paced fifty minutes, Garth told the story of the Iroquois that he researched.

The first slide showed the Five Nations that we know: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. In the 1700s, a sixth nation, the Tuscarora, would join the confederacy.

Garth pointed out that although the map shows the nations contained in NYS, they originally were in southern Canada and were pushed southward. The Algonquins were their arch-enemy across the future St Lawrence River.

Of course, there was a photo of the classic longhouse. Next came the classic women tending to the three crop sisters.

Then came the reminders of local raids and massacres as, Garth noted, were on his mind from recent Sylvia articles. An old historical marker in Round Top noted the Strobe massacre, with Garth retelling some of the details of that event, with the survivors telling their side of the story.

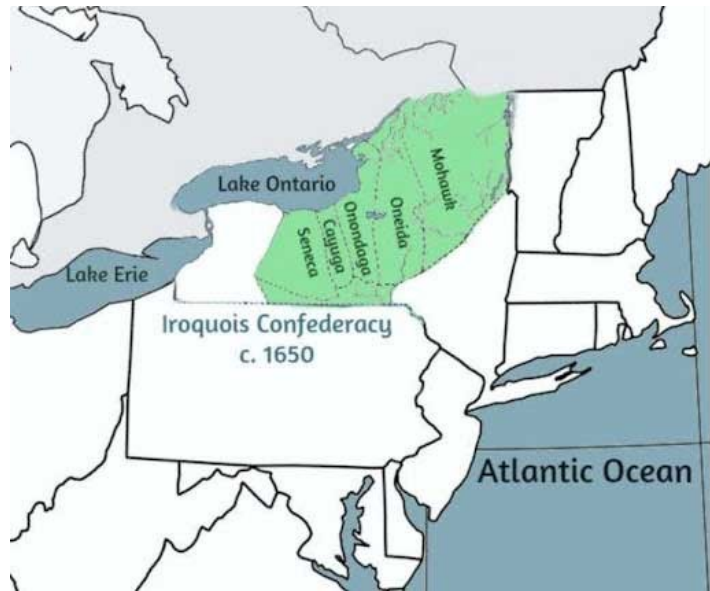
The second one, Garth admitting to being surprised at, and most of us also, was the Dietz raid in Rensselaerville in 1781, resulting in eight dead and three captured.

These five Iroquoian speaking tribes call themselves the Haudenosaunee [hoe-dee-no-show-nee], people of the Long House. Between 1150 AD - 1400 AD, Hiawatha and Dekanawidah were instrumental in forming the Iroquois Confederation to become a force in the large area.

Although life was not that peaceful, the Iroquois way of life was to be disrupted, even more so in ensuing years, with the arrival of Jacques Cartier, often credited with the discovery of New France in 1534.

Cartier encountered and noted that the numerous native tribes were split in two groups based on shared language. Algonquins occupied mostly north of the Great Lakes and the Saint Lawrence River and the Iroquois mostly south of the Great Lakes.

These various tribes had an ancient history of making war on each other. The continuation of these hostilities hindered the settling of New France so that no permanent



settlement was established until 1605.

Which is where Samuel de Champlain arrives on the scene in 1609. He is quoted: "I had come with no other intention than to make War."

And, of course, that is what everyone got.

The French had aligned themselves with the Algonquin tribes in their conflict with the Iroquois. Champlain, using firearms, defeats a band of Mohawks near Lake Champlain, cementing that enmity.

Meanwhile, the Dutch settled Fort Orange (Albany) in 1624. The Dutch are in business to bring home beaver pelts. And thus a Beaver War erupts, with tribes willing to bring beaver pelts in if they receive something worthwhile in return. Guns!

And with guns, dominance happened. The only way to maintain military dominance over the other tribes was with European weapons. The only thing to trade was beaver pelts. The only way to find new sources of pelts was to invade one's neighbors, made possible through European weapons. It was a self-perpetuating circle that ended up with the Iroquois controlling a quarter of the country. Alas, it eventually led to their ruin.

The Iroquois defeat the Mohicans and take over the fur trade. The Dutch agree to supply them with guns. Armed with these

modern weapons, the Iroquois supplied 7,250 beaver pelts to the Dutch in 1626. The number increased to 10,000 by 1628.

The Iroquois use their superior numbers to either have the invaded areas acquiesce and accept Iroquois conditions or else be decimated.

(A map with years corresponds to the dates below.)

In 1638 (do not these years sound so pre-Revolutionary War?), the Iroquois tribes in western NY extended their territory.

In 1649, the Iroquois invaded the Hurons with only 10% surviving and fleeing to Montreal.

In 1651 the Iroquois destroyed the neutral Nation around Lake Erie.

In 1656, they destroyed the Erie Nation and drove the Shawnee and Miami westward.

And then the world changed, except no one knew it at the time.

In 1664, the Dutch surrendered to the British in New Amsterdam. The Iroquois will spend the next 100 years involved in the British and French fight for control of North America

One year later, in 1665, the Iroquois signed a peace treaty with French. It would last 22 years. Some Iroquois converted to Catholicism; others moved to the Montreal area. For five years, the Iroquois established seven villages on the north shore of Lake Ontario. The Iroquois used this peace on their northern border to attack and drove the Potawatomi, Chipewya and Ottawa out of present day Michigan.

In 1672, the Iroquois push into Kentucky.

In 1677, the Iroquois make war on the Susquehanna tribe in Pennsylvania

In 1679, the Iroquois invaded the Mannahoac Nation who would dis-



appear from history.

In 1680, The Iroquois finished their conquest all the way to the Mississippi River. The remaining Fox, Sauk, Miami, Shawnee and Potowatomie were forced to flee west across the Mississippi. During these 22 years the Iroquois traded large amounts of fur to the French but continued to punish any other tribe that tried to compete.

In 1688, King William's war started in the Americas. The Iroquois' 22 year peace with the French came to an end. Regular French Army troops attacked numerous Iroquois villages. The Town of Schenectady was attacked Feb 9, 1690. Sixty are killed. With the Iroquois forced to defend their home land, the Ohio valley was soon repopulated by its original tribes.

This King William's War (1688- 1697) marks a beginning of British and French Wars in the Americas

With the signing of the Great Peace Treaty of Montreal at the end of King William's War, the Iroquois continued to play England and France against each other. While promising peace with France, they ceded all lands North of the Ohio to Britain. During the nine years of war, these lands had been repopulated by the evicted tribes. For the most part, the Iroquois' longtime hatred of the

French and their Algonquin allies kept them on the British side in the wars to follow.

—Queen Anne's War - 1702- 1713

—King George's War - 1744- 1748

—French and Indian War - 1754-1763

In 1722, the Tuscarora join the Confederation.

After years of fighting with European settlers in their North Carolina homeland, the Tuscarora Tribe was ripped apart by those who wanted to resist European encroachment and those who wanted to make peace. The group resisting were defeated by an alliance of Europeans and the group seeking appeasement. The defeated group fled north and took refuge with the Iroquois. They joined the Iroquois as the sixth tribe in the confederation.

In 1763, the British defeated the French, ending the French and Indian Wars. The French are expelled from all of North America east of the Mississippi.

Although the British tried to protect Indian land rights with the Proclamation of 1763, some western tribes, led by Pontiac, rebelled against the new British rule in the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley. The Iroquois, however, after 150 years of war, were on the winning side. They were living in peace with the European settlers who had fought alongside them against the French. The peace will last only twelve years.

Then 1775 rolls around and the Revolutionary War erupted. American fought American, and Iroquois fought Iroquois

After hundreds of years the Iroquois Confederation shattered. The Onondagas tried to remain neutral.

The Oneida and Tuscarora fought with the Americans.

The Mohawks, Cayuga and Seneca supported the British. The Mohawks relocated their eastern villages west into the Finger Lakes and Susquehanna drainage areas as these eastern villages were indefensible near their new American enemies.



In 1777, the American victories at Saratoga and Oriskany changed everything again.

With the British army defeated in northern New York and most of the British Army moved to the southern colonies, the remaining British garrisoned in the Great Lakes' forts joined with their Tory and Iroquois allies to launch a scorched earth campaign against New York's frontier settlements.

The British aimed is to depopulate these communities. These frontier communities were growing a large amount of the food that supported the American Army. The Schoharie Valley alone was producing 80,000 bushels of wheat a year and was considered America's breadbasket. For the Iroquois, it was a chance to reacquire their Mohawk Valley homeland. It was their belief that if their British allies won, they would evict the American settlers and enforce the Iroquois land rights.

Garth went on to regale us with the explanation of Sir John Johnson (1741- 1830) who is the son of Sir William Johnson (1715-74). Joining the picture is Joseph Brant (1743 – 1807), brother of Molly Brant (1736-96) who has a relationship with Sir William. This part deserves a whole section for local history fans.

And the raids on the NY frontier ensued:

- Fairfield March - 1778
- Manheim - April 1778
- Ephrata 1778 - April
- Cobleskill - May 1778
- Springfield - June 1778
- Andrus Town - July 1778
- German Flats - September 1778
- Wyoming Valley - July 1778
- Cherry Valley - November 1778
- Cobleskill, again, - May 1779

The frontier was in flames. Governor Clinton of New York reported to Washington that unless something was done the frontier of New York would be pushed back to the Hudson River Valley.

Washington responded with a brilliant strategy. France's entry in the war caused the British to evacuate Philadelphia. Rather than chase them back to New York, he gave General Sullivan a third of the Army and ordered him to attack up the Susquehanna River Valley and destroy the Iroquois homeland. The New York Militia would join the attack from the east. At the same time, General Van Schaick would attack westward out of Fort Stanwix and destroy the Onondaga Villages. Sullivan marched all the way to the Genesee River, destroying more than 40 villages and 160,000 bushels of corn. This campaign broke the power of the Iroquois. They fled further west to Fort Niagara where they were forced to beg the British for food to get through the winter.

The two years following Sullivan's campaign, Johnson and Brandt tried to reignite the frontier war. The destruction of the closest Iroquois villages had made these attacks more difficult for the British to carry out. The number of attacks were greatly diminished.

Although limited in number, the attacks of 1780 and 1781 were bloody.

- Cherry Valley is attacked April 24, 1780. - 30 are killed, 71 wounded or captured.
- May 21, 1780 - Johnson led an attack on his boyhood home of Johnstown. He allowed his Indian allies to slaughter his former neighbors.

- August 2, 1780 - Fort Plains was attacked. 45 killed and 100 houses burned.
- 1780 - Strobe farm attacked in Round Top. 2 killed and 1 captured
- Oct. 17, 1780 - Johnson attacked Schoharie with 1200 men. Approx. 40 killed.
- July 9, 1781 - Sharon Springs attacked. 40 killed or captured.
- Sept. 1, 1781 - Deitz massacre in Rensselaerville. 8 killed 3 captured.
- Oct. 25, 1781 - Johnstown again - 12 killed, 29 wounded & captured. Noted Tory Walter Butler killed most likely by an Oneida warrior fighting for the Americans.

And then a senseless act of anger and revenge:

In June of 1782 the war was essentially over. Peace treaty negotiations were underway. People on the frontier began to return to their prewar lifestyles. For the Tories and Iroquois it had become apparent they had backed the losing side and would lose their properties. In an act of spite, 300 of them decided to seek revenge. The British Army, acknowledging that the war was over, refused to participate. The attack was launched on the tiny hamlet of Little Falls. Around twenty residents took refuge in the grist mill where they were working. The attackers burned the mill to the ground. When the defenders fled the burning building, they were either killed or captured. The dead are scalped and some of the captives were tortured to death on the spot. This was the last raid of the war.

The Treaty of Paris officially ended the Revolution on September 3, 1783.

No provision at all was made for the treatment of the Indian Tribes that fought in the war. The savagery of the wartime fighting on the New York frontier ensured that the Iroquois would not be allowed to stay in their homeland in New York. A few Seneca remained in extreme western New York and Pennsylvania. The majority of the Iroquois were allowed to migrate to Canada by the British. Joseph and Molly Brant

joined this migration. Most would settle in lands north and west of modern day Toronto. Ironically, this land was the historical home of the Huron, a tribe the Iroquois had annihilated 135 years earlier.

Only the Oneida were allowed to stay. In reward for their support of the American cause, they were given a portion of their traditional homeland on the east end of Oneida Lake. The Iroquois, like all Native Americans, would not achieve full US citizen rights until the passing of the Indian Citizen Act in 1924.

And thus ended Garth's account of the once mighty and powerful Iroquois now reduced to almost nothing.

Garth, thank you for a historical lesson, tragic in so many ways.

And I must add that my recent week-long trip to Quebec City in late August reaffirmed many facets of this history, albeit with a French perspective, flavored with a British slant and then a Canadian one (the Dominion of Canada was formed in 1867).

The same issues of this history of treatment with the tribes, now lumped together as the Indigenous People, is a matter of conscience and cultural reconciliation that is seen in the new Quebec City.

And the power of the once mighty Iroquois is a key piece of Canadian history.

September Program

The upcoming program on September 9 celebrates the centennial of the founding of Pine Lake Manor. Join us and the Schermer/Baumann clan to mark this momentous benchmark. Pine Lake Manor is one of our three resorts surviving from the early 20th century to the present day. Amy Short, Joanne and Tom's daughter, will lead the presentation. I am encouraging all of us to share stories of PLM and/or any of the other resorts we have experience with, and of the details of a way of life that is facing uncertain times. Thank you, Amy, for allowing us to celebrate with you and family.

Other Notes:

Correction needed: I was cued in that I made a couple of errors in the report on Flip's canvas of Greenville's Rt 32.

First: The individual that worked on road construction, and played music in a band, with Flip's dad was Joe Capone, and Joe also worked in his off-season with Andy Marrone.

Second: It was Andy's son Adam who joined the business, building a business site on Tan Hollow Road. Adam is now deceased.

—Thank you, Stephanie and Christine, for another stellar presentation of “light refreshments.” Each month has a whole new face of types and tastes!

—I humorously noted to the audience that the world had changed during the week I was in Quebec City. Seemingly most important was Joe Biden deciding not to run. However, the real big news... was sad local history news. The Westerner is now closed, after almost sixty year in business. It is an end of an era that someone should try to document before too much more time passes.

—Debra reminded the group of the art exhibit this month, and soon to change.

—I have taken the 2025 calendar text and photos to the printer, readying for an October reveal.

—And again, because it is so deserved, thank you Garth for a quality program.