

# IROQUOIA

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Volume 5, October 2019



# Iroquoia:

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Conference on Iroquois Research

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# Leaving Home for the Unknown: Pathways of Iroquois Recruited into the Early Nineteenth-Century Westward Fur Trade

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During the first two decades of the nineteenth century 600 or so named Iroquois from today's Quebec communities of Kahnawà:ke, Akwesasne, and Oka left home for the unknown. They were individually recruited into a fur trade that was dashing west across North America in search of much sought animal pelts. Iroquois' lives would take four different pathways. They paddled back and forth, engaged the west also on land, merged with other Indigenous peoples, or variously made their own way across time and place. Whichever their pathways, briefly introduced here, Iroquois' tenacity and determination is admirable.

My entryway into the topic

My entryway into this topic was happenstance. It is now a decade and a half since an Iroquois descendant wanting to know more about his inheritance contacted me as a historian of western

North America who might be able to help. Carey's antecedent, who he knew as "The Iroquois," had left his Caughnawaga, now Kahnawà:ke, home to seek employment in the western fur trade and never looked back. Eventually settling down on a small island off northern British Columbia with a woman of Indigenous and Hawaiian descent, The Iroquois raised a large family whence Carey descended. It was our off-and-on conversations whenever he located new scraps of information and had free time from his job as an air traffic controller at the Vancouver Airport that grew my interest. I found myself putting aside whatever I came across in my own research that might be of interest, initially as topics for conversation and increasingly as an end in itself respecting Iroquois making their way across North America. The end result would be the publication by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2019 in its McGill-Queen's Native and Northern Series of *Iroquois in the West*, from whose insights this essay draws.<sup>1</sup>

### Searching for Iroquois in the fur trade

One of the first tasks I set for myself was to get a general sense of "Iroquois," as they were termed in the westward fur trade.<sup>2</sup> My search for Iroquois in western North America, whence the fur trade headed as older areas were trapped out, became increasingly systematic, in line with my growing understanding of the topic generally.<sup>3</sup> Agreement appears to exist that the word Iroquois originated as the name of the family of languages spoken by five, later six, Indigenous peoples living south of Lake Ontario who prior to contact with non-Indigenous outsiders formed a league or confederacy. From the late 1660s, some Iroquois for various reasons left the Iroquois Confederacy for the Jesuit mission of Sault St. Louis, later known as Caughnawaga and today as Kahnawà:ke, located south of today's Montreal. A number of those doing so subsequently splintered off, some heading up the St. Lawrence River to the Saint Régis mission at Akwesasne, others to a Sulpician community northwest of

Montreal at Kanesatake, known by virtue of its location as Lac de Deux Montagnes and today as Oka.

My beginning date in searching for Iroquois in the westward fur trade was 1800 when they were first hired in numbers, my end date 1821 when the two major fur trading companies joined forces. The Hudson's Bay Company [HBC] based in London took over the North West Company [NWC] based in Montreal, ending the heady competition that had encouraged the hiring of Iroquois.

To get a sense of how many Iroquois from Caughnawaga, Saint Régis, and Lac de Deux Montagnes were employed in the fur trade as it raced west, 1800-21, I drew with the authors' permission on two complementary primary sources, both freely accessible online with their content searchable. Conceived and organized by Nicole St-Onge of the University of Ottawa and located on the *Société historique de Saint Boniface* website, the Voyager Contracts Database contains, among a much larger number of items, 1,100 fur trade contracts agreed between 1800 and 1821 by 530 "Iroquois" whose names, unless they themselves were literate, were written down as the notary in charge heard them pronounced.<sup>4</sup> Bruce Watson's *Lives Lived West of the Divide*, comprised of capsule biographies based on a systematic and thorough reading of fur trade journals and other primary sources, identifies sixty Iroquois, not all in the Voyager Contracts Database, as employed prior to 1821 in the Pacific Northwest, comprising today's British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon.<sup>5</sup> By a matching process also drawing on additional Iroquois located in NWC and HBC records held in the Manitoba Archives, including in the lone surviving NWC Ledger, 1811-21, I identified 600 Iroquois as employed in the westward fur trade at some point in time between 1800 and 1821.<sup>6</sup> Anyone wanting to follow up on Iroquois named here can do so online in the Voyager Contracts Database and, if employed west of the Rocky Mountains, also in Watson's *Lives Lived West of the Divide*.<sup>7</sup>

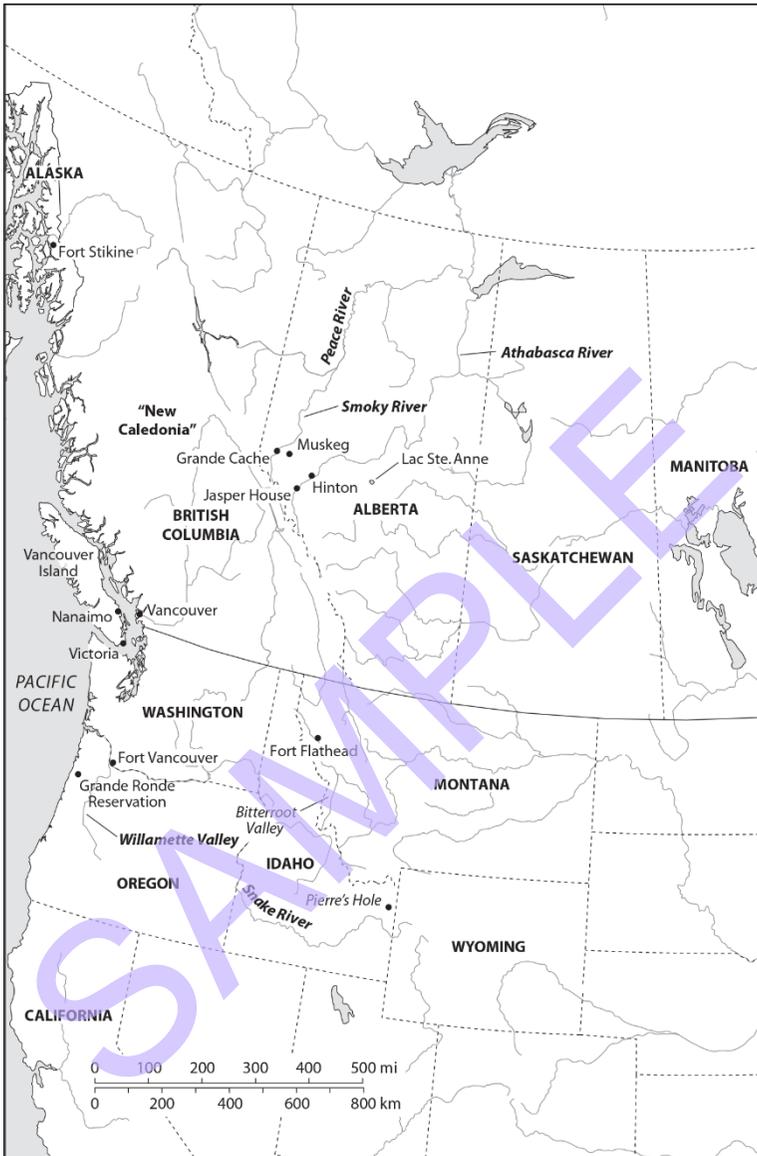
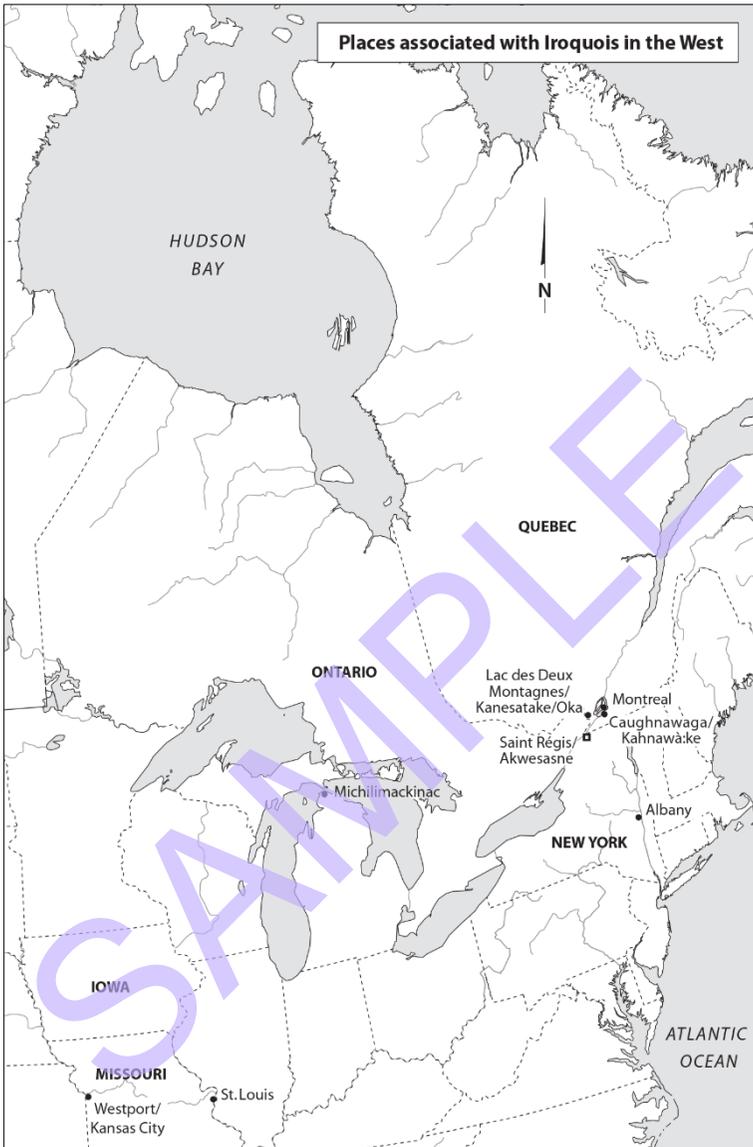


Figure 1. Locations associated with Iroquois in the west. Map by Bill Nelson



## Opting for the fur trade

Iroquois had been independent-minded long before 600 or so from among their number engaged the westward fur trade. Iroquois self-confidence is exemplified by Caughnawagas during the first half of the eighteenth century daring to trade animal pelts, not in nearby Montreal controlled by France as also was Caughnawaga, but illicitly in Albany, New York, in English territory where better terms were to be had. They knew their own minds and acted accordingly.

Fur trade companies' recruitment of Iroquois alongside French Canadians and others during the first two decades of the nineteenth century responded to the seemingly insatiable demand in Europe for animal pelts used to trim garments and for the much prized underfur of the beaver to become the felt of fashionable men's hats. The NWC based in Montreal and the HBC in London with its North America center of operations on Hudson Bay were, along with smaller counterparts, so hungry for capable employees they recruited Iroquois from Caughnawaga, Lake of Two Mountains, and Saint Régis from the turn of the nineteenth century on a par as to wages and conditions of employment with their non-Indigenous counterparts.

## Paddling back and forth

All but 150 of the 1,100 contracts agreed by Iroquois located in the Voyageur Contracts Database were to man the large canoes taking goods west in the spring to trade with Indigenous peoples, returning to Montreal in late summer with pelts. A small minority of paddlers' contracts were for designated time periods.

These to-and-fro contracts, whereby men left home in order to return, were negotiated far in advance in order to ensure companies acquired their full complement of paddlers so as to head west as soon in the spring as the ice was off the St.

# A Susquehannock Hermaphrodite Noted in the Investigation of a Seneca killed in 1722

Marshall Joseph Becker  
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Anthropological interest in those individuals within an American Indian culture who assumed the dress, social status and role of a person of the sex opposite to what had been assigned to them at birth primarily dates back to a study by Frank Cushing, “Birth of the Old Ones” in his famous *Zuñi Creation Myths* (1896: 401-403). These individuals, described in the early ethnographic literature as “berdache” (bardash etc.; updated by Jacobs et al. 1997), were soon after recognized within a number of traditional societies where they are normative members. An example, from among the Lakota, identifies beings known as *winyanktehca* (*winkte*) who were assigned a male gender at birth but who preferred to assume female roles. Williams (1986: 87-109; see also Callender and Kochems 1983) collected the literature on the subject, and extended recognition of examples back into the 1830s with the writings of Alexander Maximilian’s travels in America. Since the 1980s, writings on this subject (e.g. Roscoe 1998; Williams 2010) had expanded enormously even before the

gay rights movement became a significant public and political issue in American society.

Mary Douglas's classic study, *Purity and Danger* (1966), provided an extremely useful theoretical framework with which to address these issues of sex and gender. James Thayer (1980) applied Douglas's model to the berdache, forming a focus for much of the later research. By 1990 a convergence of research led a number of scholars and Native American activists to focus on the term "two-spirit" as an acceptable pan-Indian term for "third gender" or other gender variant roles. This neologism tends to be used as a replacement for "berdache," but without clarification regarding its meaning

#### A Hermaphrodite among the Susquehannock in 1722

In early February of 1722, allegations reached Philadelphia regarding the death of an Indian at the hands of traders along the lower Susquehanna River. The colonial government immediately recognized this act as occurring on Pennsylvania's western frontier where settlements of Susquehannock, Shawnee, Ganawese and Lenape were clustered. Marauding bands from the Five Nations Iroquois often used the Susquehanna River as a conduit to travel to and through Maryland where they sought scalps and prisoners. Other members of the Five Nations also lived in the area, as outliers from their Native communities. Rupp (1844: 176) gives the name of the deceased as Saanteenee (see below for variant spellings) and identifies him as a Seneca who had a hunting camp in the lower Susquehanna drainage.

Despite the problems of conflicts between Natives and colonists along the frontier, even a single death such as this attracted considerable attention. The fine balance among and between tribes and colonies was maintained by paying attention to any conflict, and a possible killing called for immediate action. This news of a Native's death led, in March of 1722, to extensive

hearings on the matter being held at meetings of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

On 7 March, James Logan and Col. John French, two of Pennsylvania's foremost diplomats and specialists in Indian affairs, set out for Conestoga, the village then occupied by the Susquehannock (Becker 2018b). Their goal was to take official testimonies from members of the various Native groups and from several colonists who then were resident in the general area where the killing took place (Colonial Records of Penna. 1840, III: 165ff; 1852b, III: 145-152). On 21 March 1722, following "Colo. French's Return from Conestogoe ...," on his fact finding mission, French reported extensively on his discoveries regarding this case. His journey had begun as a mission to apprehend the alleged perpetrators of the murder, the "Brothers John & Edmund Cartlidge ..." who were traders "towards Patowmeck" (Col. Rec. PA 1840, III: 146). When he reached the Susquehanna River, on 14 March, Col. French met with representatives of the four tribes then living along the lower reaches. These elders were later described as "the Chiefs of the *Conestogoes*, the *Delaware Indians*, on *Brandy-Wine*, the *Canawese*, and the *Shawanese Indians*" (Thomson 1759: 15). Present at this council were elders representing these three, or four groups, plus one Cayuga; names as follows:

Civility, Tannacharoe, Gunnehatorooja, Toweena, and other old men of the Conestogoe Indians. Savannah, Chief of the Shawanese, Winjack, Chief of the Ganawese, Tekaachroon, a Cayoogoe. Oweeyekanoa, Noshtarghkamen, Delawares [Lenape?] [and] Present divers English & Indians.

*Colonial Rec. of Penna. 1840, III: 146.*

Rupp (1844: 177) spells the name of "Oweeyekanoa" as "Oweeyekanowa" and also indicates that Satcheecho had already been sent to the Five Nations as a messenger regarding this affair since it involved the death of a Seneca. The concern of the Provincial Council was that a group of Seneca might come from

New York to avenge this death before the matter could be rectified without further bloodshed.

Colonel French had brought with him to this conference at least two belts of wampum, one of which was to be presented to the family of the deceased, who had been killed about 40 days earlier. That first wampum belt served as a condolence belt, and perhaps also a form of wergild sent by the Provincial Council. At the actual hearing at Conestoga, on 14 March 1722, Secretary Logan, after “laying down of [the] Belt of Wampum on the Board before them” asked for a recounting of the relevant events. Also in attendance at the meeting was “Smith the Ganawese, who excels in the skill of those Languages” and who was serving as translator (Colonial Records of PA 1852b, III: 148-149; Eshleman 1909: 266). According to Colonel French’s findings recorded at Conestoga, the death occurred at Manakassy, a branch of the Potomac River. The victim was named Sawantaeny and he was identified as a member of the “Tsanondowaroonas or Sinnekaes” tribe. French described him first as a warrior, then as “a civil Man of very few words.” Sawantaeny had a hunting camp along the Potomac where he operated along with a Shawnee woman named Weynepreeueyta keeping his cabin.

It was to this hunting camp that John Cartlidge, his Ganawese guide named Aiyaquachan, and others had come to trade with Sawantaeny for the skins that he had amassed, presumably over the winter hunting season. Aiyaquachan must have been very familiar with this area as the Ganawese people had originally been identified as the Piscataway of Maryland and had lived in this part of the upper Potomac before relocating into Pennsylvania about 1700, after which they were identified as “Ganawese” and then Conoy. Colonel French gathered all these people to hold an official inquest into this death. Included were Aiyaquachan together with:

...two Indian Shawana Lads [who] came thither about the same time, whose Names are Acquittanachke and Metheegueyta; also, his Squaw, a Shawanese Woman named Weynepreeueyta, Cousin to Savannah, Chief of that Nation, who are all here present.

Then Winjack and Savannah, Chiefs of the Ganawese & Shanawese [respectively], were required to Charge those four witnesses of the ffact, of their respective Nations to speak the Truth impartially, without malice or hatred [etc.]

*Colonial Records of PA 1840, III: 148; 1852b, III: 150*

Since the term “Seneca” often was used collectively for some or all of the Five Nations it was important to identify the specific tribe of the deceased. “Sawantaeny of the Tsanondowaroonas or Sinnekaes” can be confirmed as a true Seneca through later discussion of the Colonial government sending wergild to the deceased’s family. The three Shawnee witnesses in this case were asked to withdraw so that Cartlidge’s guide “Ayaquachan, the Ganawese, aged according to appearance, about thirty years, was called upon to give an account of what he knew.” Acting as guide for the traders, he had arrived in the evening at the deceased Indian’s cabin together with the Cartlidge brothers and their servants, “William Wilkins and one Jonathan.” The deponent and their Seneca host Sawantaeny “were drunk that Night.” The fateful encounter the next day is described in some detail, but many aspects were recognized by Colonel French as missing as “this Deponent was in Liquor at that time and knows no more.”

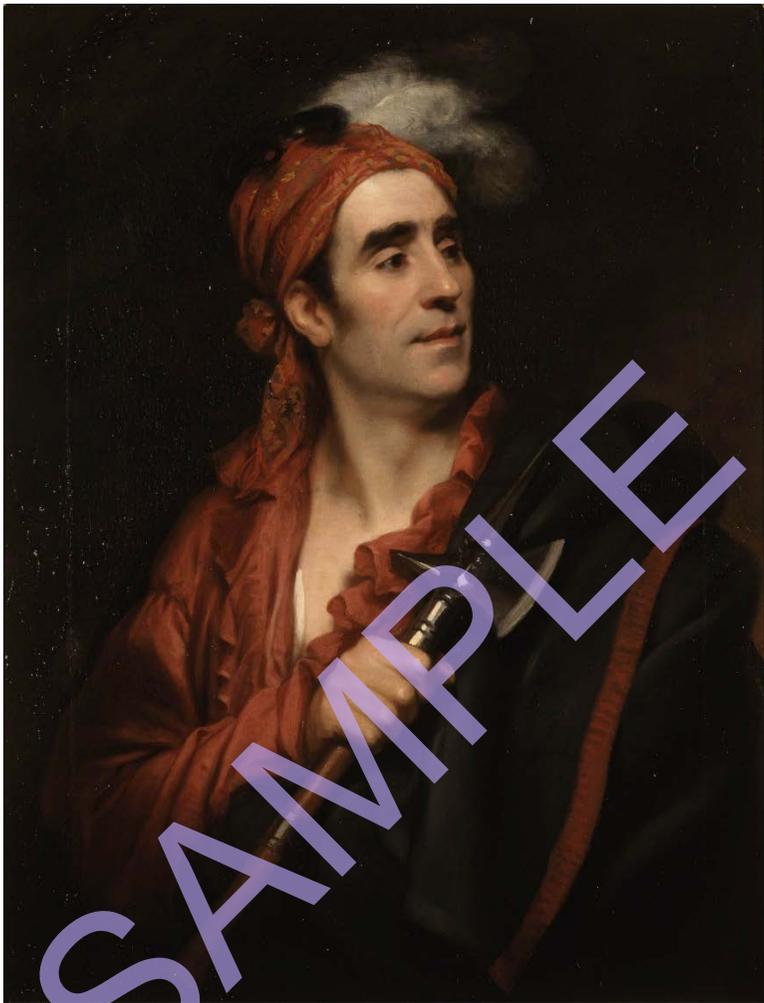
Then “Aquannachke, the Shawana, aged in appearance about twenty two years” testified that he had also arrived on the scene along “with John Cartlidge and his Company.” His testimony largely duplicated that of Ayaquachan, but provided several specific details of the fateful encounter. The day following that night of drinking, the Seneca named Sawantaeny had been “pressing for more Liquor” when John Cartlidge “threw him down cross a tree.” Sawantaeny got up and went toward his cabin, followed by William Wilkins who:

# INDIGENOUS-USE HALBERD- STYLE TOMAHAWKS: ARE THEY REAL?

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I wrote an article on portraits of John Norton, or Teyoninhokarawen, for *Iroquoia* (vol. 4, 2018, pp. 7-39) in which I suggested that the three-headed, halberd-style tomahawk depicted in the 1815 painting of the Mohawk leader by Thomas Phillips either was a fiction or a European object without a North American connection (Fig. 1). My opinion generated some discussion, which led me to investigate two questions: did indigenous people use Euro-American-made halberd-style tomahawks as tools or weapons during the time when conflict marked much of the history of eastern North America before 1815; and, are those depicted in documentary art representative of such artifacts?

Halberds were two-handed edged weapons typically mounted on six- to seven-foot-long poles (Fig. 2). European and subsequent colonial military forces used them from the latter part of the Middle Ages to the late 1700s. They could be made to a high standard by armorers or be produced simply – even crudely – by blacksmiths. Once firearms came to dominate battlefields,



*Figure 1. Major John Norton, by Thomas Phillips, RA, 1815. The halberd-style “tomahawk” is a fiction or a studio prop. Courtesy of the Northumberland Estates.*

halberd use declined except among sergeants for the most part, who carried them primarily as marks of rank, but also employed them as tools to keep soldiers in formation and as devices to send signals, although they could be wielded as weapons in close-



*Figure 2. Halberd head, c.1620. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 53.187.*

quarters combat (Fig. 3). Halberds served non-military purposes as well: Samuel de Champlain, for instance, wrote that Basque whalers used them in the early 1600s.<sup>1</sup> Euro-Americans also had weapons or tools with similar halberd-style heads on shorter handles, such as cavalry poleaxes (Fig. 4). A metal tomahawk that resembled a halberd head would be similar to a poleaxe and would have three (not two) “business ends,” either an ax and two spikes; or an ax, a spike, and a hook; or an ax, a spike, and a hammer. A spear point might be used instead of a spike. In order to be practical, these features would have to be smaller on a one-handed poleaxe (or “battle ax” or cavalry ax) than they would be on a two-handed, long-pole halberd, as would be the case for a tomahawk. Additionally, the components would have to be functional in terms of their proportions, strength, and construction.

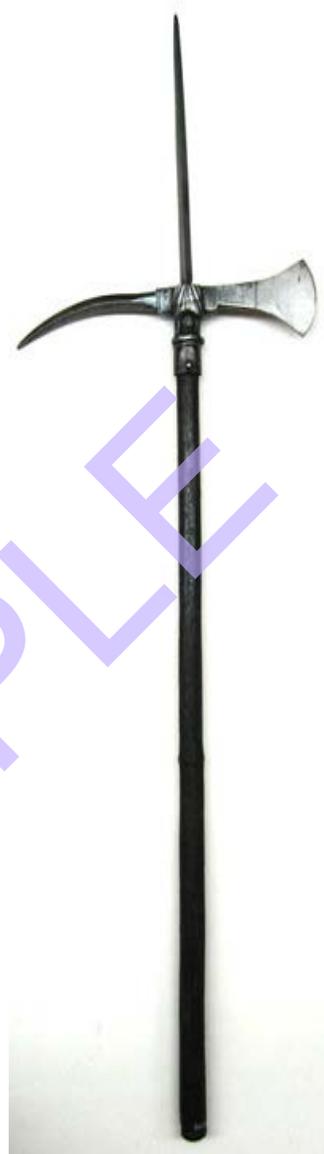
quarters combat (Fig. 3). Halberds served non-military purposes as well: Samuel de Champlain, for instance, wrote that Basque whalers used them in the early 1600s.<sup>1</sup> Euro-Americans also had weapons or tools with similar halberd-style heads on shorter handles, such as cavalry poleaxes (Fig. 4). A metal tomahawk that resembled a halberd head would be similar to a poleaxe and would have three (not two) “business ends,” either an ax and two spikes; or an ax, a spike, and



*Figure 3. Sergeant with a halberd from the Coldstream Guards, by Thomas Kirk after Edward Dayes, 1792. Some of the “tomahawks” misattributed to native use are halberd heads, being too large for one-handed weapons. Courtesy of the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library, 247418*

In exploring my questions, I restricted my studies to objects that putatively would have been used as tools or weapons before 1815 by First Nations people in eastern North America, thus excluding things of ceremonial, theatrical, non-indigenous, or other uses that may have been created afterwards. My conclusions are: those depicted in documentary art were not used by aboriginal peoples, being either fantasies or studio props; however, halberd-style tomahawks do seem to have existed in native contexts, but were so rare that someone's possession of one ought to be considered idiosyncratic. Most halberd-style "tomahawks" associated with pre-1815 indigenous use in museum and other collections have been misattributed to native people, either innocently, incompetently, or nefariously, or are later artifacts that were not meant to be used as weapons or tools but only fulfilled symbolic, histrionic, or fantasy roles.

Two representative misattributed halberd-style "tomahawks" that have warped our perceptions of the legitimacy of this sort of object may be seen at the website of the Smithsonian Institution's National



*Figure 4. European single-handed halberd-style cavalry ax, 1600s-1700s, of the type often misidentified as an indigenous-use tomahawk. Courtesy of the Royal Armouries, Sweden, 26813.*

Museum of the American Indian. One came to the Smithsonian from Harold J. Hibben (1881-1956), a collector who acquired it from an individual who said he had dug it up in West Virginia. Cataloged to 1800-20, it has an ax, two protruding spikes, and a pipe bowl. Yet, the thing clearly never was in the ground, the size of the ax is so large that the spike that protrudes horizontally from the haft is useless, and the “hockey stick” handle is most unusual. Even in a photograph, anyone with expertise in material culture can tell, from its construction, that it is not from the early 1800s. It is a fantasy – I suspect from the 1900s. It has been passed off on a collector who accepted the story uncritically, which the Smithsonian did not question when it took possession of the object, and which other people interested in tomahawks then accepted as legitimate in their publications and on their websites, perhaps not knowing that museum catalog data needs to be read with perspicacity. The other problematic halberd-style “tomahawk” at the NMAI – from the same collector – has a reputed provenance to Fort Duquesne in Pennsylvania, has been assumed to be of First Nations rather than Euro-American use, and has been dated to 1700-50. The catalog information, however, does not say why it comes from there, why it is of that date, or why it has an aboriginal association. This is curious because the history of its ownership does not provide any reason to assume that it has a native connection, as it apparently came down through several generations of a non-aboriginal family. In fact, the ridiculously short handle almost certainly is a severely cut-down halberd haft, especially because it includes a metal butt cone used to protect the haft when the bottom end rested on the ground when a soldier held a halberd in a vertical position or wished to plant it firmly in a diagonal position, such as used in a formation with other troops to resist a cavalry charge (as occurred in European contexts). Poleaxes and tomahawks, of course, had no need of butt cones. The problem with these two objects – the only halberd-style “tomahawks” on the Smithsonian’s website – are typical of similar objects in other

collections but they have been used to affirm a historiographical error and legitimize other inauthentic objects (which is not uncommon in the antique and art markets or within the realms of the collector and museum worlds).<sup>2</sup> Another example of a problematic halberd-style “tomahawk” that has gained misguided attention is one displayed in 2005 at the Senator John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh, in the Seven Years’ War exhibit *Clash of Empires*. Although attributed to the Catawbas of the 1700s at the time, it appeared for sale four years later at Cowan’s Auctions as a “tomahawk’ style halberd,” that is, a halberd, not a tomahawk. The provenance given by Cowan’s stated that someone discovered it in North Carolina “in an Indian smokehouse around 1880.” Such a provenance, fundamentally, is no provenance in leading us back to either the Seven Years’ War or eighteenth-century native use, so only its construction could be assessed to suggest a date and function. I cannot tell from the online image if it credibly could be linked to the mid-1700s (but I note that it did not sell, which suggests that potential purchasers had doubts about it). Importantly, the size of the head is too large for a hand-held tomahawk but fine for a halberd – such as may have been carried by colonial militia – because the spike is 10.25 inches long and the blade of the ax part is 6.25 inches. The handle either is a replacement or has been cut down because it is too short in relation to the metal sections, consisting of an ax and two spear points.<sup>3</sup> Cowan’s description of it as a tomahawk-style halberd is odd, but it is better than the wrong labelling at the Heinz Center, where, undoubtedly, it had a greater impact on public perceptions than it did at the auction house. Another questionable object promoted as an indigenous-use halberd-style “tomahawk” apparently comes from “an estate near the Mohawk Akwesasne reservation.” It, at least, is the right size for single-handed use; however, it would have connected to its now-missing haft with only one rivet, which made it too fragile for use because the first blow anybody would have made with it would have broken it off from its handle. Thus, it is not fit for

use, and therefore can be rejected as inauthentic. Judging from its construction, it likely is a nineteenth-century object that was not meant to be functional as a weapon or a tool, and its geographical provenance is virtually meaningless.<sup>4</sup>

Halberd-headed objects of potentially the right size for a tomahawk have been found at the eighteenth-century military sites of Fort Edward in New York and Fort Ligonier in Pennsylvania, and thus have the virtue of coming with better provenances, but to assume that they are of indigenous rather than newcomer use seems inappropriate without more evidence, even though native peoples visited the posts and camps of their non-aboriginal allies.<sup>5</sup> For instance, of 300,000 archaeological objects excavated at Fort York in Ontario, where natives and newcomers interacted, only 55 have been linked to indigenous use or potential use, of which some long pre-date the establishment of the post in 1793.<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, much of Fort York's military history postdates 1815, so the balance of native- and non-native-associated artifacts presumably is skewed chronologically, but even fewer indigenous or indigenous-use objects have been found at Forts Edward and William Henry that date to the Euro-American military occupation of these eighteenth-century sites.<sup>7</sup> At Fort Erie in Ontario, archaeology on the 1764-1803 portion of the site produced only 50 objects that can be associated with native use out of the tens of thousands recovered.<sup>8</sup> While we should remember that native people likely possessed other objects found at these sites that cannot be attributed to First Nations use because they are the same as those owned by settler society (such as gun flints), the number of such items presumably is very small. There are other comparable objects that have been found in the ground but associating them to the First Nations also seems questionable. For instance, in 1902, William Beauchamp published an article on indigenous-use metal artifacts, which included an example of a halberd-style head found near Fort Bull in New York (the site

of an Anglo-French battle in 1756) that he assumed was a tomahawk. Yet, there is no reason to think it was something carried by an aboriginal person instead of a Euro-American. Like those at Forts Edward and Ligonier, we cannot dismiss it as potentially having been owned by a warrior; yet there is no specific reason to think that it was, and probability would suggest that it was something possessed by a Euro-American. Another problem is that we do not know how old the object is that Beauchamp associated with Fort Bull because someone found it in a non-archaeological context and it does not possess any particular diagnostic qualities to determine age beyond a broad chronology between the 1600s and 1800s (although modern metallurgical testing might provide a better sense of its manufacturing context).<sup>9</sup> Likewise, a blacksmith-quality, halberd-style object that is small enough to be a tomahawk head was found in western Illinois along the Mississippi River. Unfortunately, we know nothing else about it.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond unconvincing examples in public and private collections, another factor in doubting the authenticity of halberd-style tomahawks lies in the opposite: their absence in collections. The National Museum of the American Indian, for instance, has dozens of tomahawks, such as spontoon-shaped examples and classic pipe tomahawks but, apparently, only the two halberd-style objects discussed above. (Some of the other kinds of tomahawks appear to be inauthentic, but any large museum will have miscataloged and otherwise uncertain things in its holdings.) Beyond the NMAI, I contacted collectors, experts in relevant material culture studies, archaeologists, antique dealers, museums, and heritage organizations to see if they had examples or knew of provenanced pieces, and, except in one case – discussed below – there were no credible examples of native-use halberd-style tomahawks pre-dating 1815 in the collections checked or in the memories of the people who responded, most of whom were skeptical about the existence of such artifacts.

Two of the people I discussed this with, however, believed that pre-1815 functional halberd-style tomahawks existed beyond the level of idiosyncrasy; but, while I respect their expertise and appreciate their helpfulness, I do not think they proved their points because the examples they cited are artefacts and images that I have dismissed in this article or are closely related to those examples.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, period lists of trade goods and similar documents that I examined or that others have studied are silent on the existence of halberd-style tomahawks, although it is not inconceivable that somebody somewhere in colonial America acquired European cavalry poleaxes or similar objects to trade or give to native people or that warriors captured and then used halberd-style axes, but I could not find evidence for these possibilities. There is, however, documentation to show that settler societies used halberds in North America.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the lack of archaeologically recovered halberd-style tomahawks in native contexts – aside from one exception – and in contrast to the large numbers of other axes and tomahawks that have been excavated, is important because archaeology typically is our most dependable source for determining the provenance of many artifacts of native use before modern times, with most excavations in recent decades being done by universities, museums, and cultural resource management firms.

Another issue relates to the question of utility. Aside from spontoon-type tomahawks, where the striking end looks like an inverted fleur-de-lis, most tomahawks could be used comfortably as tools as well as weapons, and even spontoon-type tomahawks regularly had functional pipe bowls attached to them. Most indigenous-use objects that came from Euro-Americans that could be used for weapons had alternative functions, whether they were knives, firearms, or other objects, while items that did not or had limited non-military utility, such as swords, were less common. A halberd-style head, at best, would have been awkward for any purpose other than combat, and would have

been an unwieldy thing to carry by people concerned about the quantity of items that they had to transport across the landscapes and waterways of eastern North America on their backs, in canoes, on toboggans, or on horses. In fact, one of the virtues of legitimate tomahawks in comparison to standard axes was their combination of utility and diminutive size when traveling.

Beyond physical and primary research, we need to consider the secondary literature on the subject. As with the other sources, the attributions contained in these texts are unconvincing. The most influential book on the subject is Harold Peterson's 1965 publication, *American Indian Tomahawks*. Peterson relied partly on the collection of the person who donated the questionable objects to the Smithsonian Institution mentioned above. His book presents a number of halberd-style artifacts, but the accompanying text indicates that they came from non-native contexts, often are too big for tomahawks or comparable Euro-American poleaxes, and, as he noted, in fact could be halberd heads. Some examples clearly are fictions, such as the one mentioned earlier at the NMAI that supposedly was dug up in West Virginia. One possible exception in his study is an object with a small head that reputedly came from a seventeenth-century non-native home in Kingston, New York, but which was found with items associated with native-newcomer trade. It consists of an ax, hook, and spear point.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps it was something of indigenous use, or at least had been intended for a native consumer, but we cannot be sure. Its existence, however, has been used to imply that another example, in the collection of the Museum of the Fur Trade, is a "most interesting style of American tomahawk" even though that specimen was purchased in the United Kingdom, has no provenance, and is similar to European poleaxes. Consequently, the museum's claim seems to be more optimistic than is appropriate, and is representative of the problems of attribution in this realm where someone uses thin evidence from a standard but less-than-fully-credible source

to make an incautious assertion.<sup>14</sup> More prudent individuals have rejected the potential of halberd-style tomahawks being used by indigenous peoples, aside from the possibility of rare exceptions. For instance, Timothy J. Kent, in his study of material culture from the Great Lakes fur-trade era notes the existence of halberd-type axes among French forces in colonial America, but he did not find trustworthy evidence of their use by natives among archaeological and other objects or in the documentation he examined.<sup>15</sup>

The sole exception to the absence of verifiable halberd-style tomahawks connected to native people that I learned about in my research is one found in the 1940s, which James Bradley (famous for his important 1987 book, *Evolution of the Onondaga Iroquois*) brought to my attention (Fig. 5). A farmer uncovered it when plowing and accidentally intruded into a cemetery associated with the Jamesville site in New York, an Onondaga village dating between the 1690s and the 1710s. The artefact now rests in the collection of the Onondaga County Historical Association. It is a blacksmith-made item and is small enough to be a tomahawk head. At the time, the Onondagas enjoyed access to both French and English blacksmiths. It has an ax, spike, and spear point and would have attached to its half through a forged eye, similar to how most axes were (and continue to be) fixed to their handles. It is not quite complete, as small parts of the spike and ax are missing.<sup>16</sup> The ax, hook, and spear design is similar conceptually to the one mentioned above from Kingston, although the Kingston example fitted onto a haft via a tang. Was the artifact from Onondaga meant to be used as a tool or weapon; or, was it a prestige item, or was it both? We never will know, but it has the virtue of having been found in an apparently credible indigenous context, albeit not in one excavated by professional archaeologists.

From the above discussion, we are left with very few halberd-style heads that are, or could have been, associated with

indigenous people's employment of them as tools or weapons pre-dating 1815 (and none seem to post-date the Seven Years' War). The logical conclusion is that they were, at best, very rare objects, being so unusual that ownership of one by an aboriginal person would have been downright peculiar.



*Figure 5. A halberd-style head of the right size for a hand-held weapon, plowed up in 1949 from a c. 1700 Onondaga site in New York, now in the collection of the Onondaga Historical Association. This is the best provenanced example of this type of tomahawk design, and its rarity indicates that the form was most uncommon. Courtesy of James W. Bradley.*

If I do not think halberd-style tomahawks were used as tools and weapons by native peoples in eastern North America, with perhaps rare exception, then why do examples exist physically? As I have noted above, some are fictions, and some are real objects of Euro-American use that have been misattributed to First Nations contexts. Others date from later times, or were made to deceive, or simply were theatrical or presentation

# Deskaheh at the League of Nations: Haudenosaunee Politics of Refusal and an Ontology of Settler-Colonialism

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This article assesses the efforts of Levi General, a Cayuga chief from the Grand River reservation in Ohsweken, Ontario, to thwart the Canadian goal of politically absorbing the Haudenosaunee.<sup>1</sup> By investigating Chief General, better known by the hereditary title of Deskaheh, and his rejection of the Canadian authority that constrained him and aboriginal people, I reveal how he utilized an interstitial location between provincial and federal governance to enunciate Haudenosaunee sovereignty. Instead of surrendering to Canadian claims of supremacy, he represented the Haudenosaunee in the space that best reflected their political character: the global arena. From 1923-1924, Deskaheh combined traditional political conceptualizations with the modernity of international law to defend treaties (as fundamentally international documents) and intrinsic Haudenosaunee autonomy at the League of Nations headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.<sup>2</sup> Deskaheh challenged the

stability of the Canadian settler-state and revealed the global sphere as a viable place for indigenous agendas as he petitioned the League for the recognition of Six Nations nationhood, garnered European support through public speaking engagements, and protested the oppression of his people and their culture. This was an extension of indigenism and the Haudenosaunee community beyond the imposed boundaries of the settler-state. It was the evolution of what Kevin Bruyneel refers to as “postcolonial nationalism,” a contemporary iteration of indigenism that resisted the “temporal and spatial impositions of [settler] colonial rule by politicizing tribal identity, agency, and autonomy in modern time and space.”<sup>3</sup> Deskaheh demonstrated the unboundedness of indigenous people by denouncing their domestication.

Whereas previous histories of Deskaheh focus on a linear narrative of his experiences at the League of Nations, and in Ontario and New York, as well as the context of his political activity, they do not critique the ideological, institutional, and systemic mechanisms within Canada and the League—what Louis Althusser calls repressive and ideological state apparatuses—that obstructed his mission.<sup>4</sup> For instance, Laurence Hauptman’s work on Deskaheh, while informative and detailed, does not explicitly interrogate how Canada and Great Britain colluded in Geneva to divert attention away from the moral and political urgency of Deskaheh’s claims. These two nations—entwined in their own postcolonial relationship—created a bureaucratic quagmire to occlude and ultimately exhaust General’s assertion of indigenism.<sup>5</sup> Joelle Rostkowski, Sally Weaver, E. Brian Titley, and Richard Veatch similarly chronicle the events, explore the role of factionalism involved in Deskaheh’s political experience, and contextualize his activism in relation to Canada’s attempt to exercise their relatively new nationhood.<sup>6</sup> Yale Belanger describes these histories as “little more than a colorful story employed to humanize academic analyses situating Six

Nations within international law and Canadian politics” to the trivialization of Deskaheh and the people of Grand River.<sup>7</sup> All of their contributions are valuable, to be sure, but my analysis offers additional dimensions to the understanding of indigenous/non-indigenous relationships, the adaptability of indigenes as both a cultural and political identity, and repositions indigenous resistance in global terms. My research also demonstrates how settler-states protected their hegemony through the suppression of indigenes.

More precisely, this article differs from the historiography in its use of settler-colonial theory to interpret the impetus behind Deskaheh's claims for Haudenosaunee sovereignty, the subsequent reaction by Canada and several key political figures therein, and the behavior of League of Nations officials in Geneva. Even more distinct is my usage of primary sources from the League of Nations Archives, which have been underutilized except in Grace Li Xiu Woo's 2003 article.<sup>8</sup> The subsequent evaluation is conducted with two anticipated outcomes. First, to show how an indigenous activist's battle to shed the yoke of settler-colonialism illustrated the “politics of refusal.” Though several scholars have used this term, Christine Garland's definition is most relevant here. Following Henry Marcuse's idea of radical praxis, Garland characterizes the politics of refusal as negating that which negates, which is fitting given the tendency of settler-colonialism to attempt to “disappear” indigenous people through genocidal and ethnocidal policies.<sup>9</sup> As a case in point, the first prime minister of Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald, said in 1880 that “if the Indians were to disappear from the continent, the Indian problem would cease to exist.”<sup>10</sup> I frame the politics of refusal here as an enactment of indigeneity, described by Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson as the “maintenance of culture, treaty, history, and self with the historical and ongoing context of settlement.” It does not accept this attempted vanishing and instead exposes the settler effort to conceal such

purgation.<sup>11</sup> Her work is also very useful in understanding refusal as an enunciation of indigenous identity, which then imperils the legitimacy of the settler-state and interrupts their processes of totalization, wherein indigenosity is eliminated, leaving behind only the settler.<sup>12</sup> Refusal exposes and rejects the destructive conditions of settler-colonialism. In circumventing the strictures of the Canadian politics in favor of a theoretically impartial international body, Deskaheh negated the settler-state and its ethos of domination, both of which subordinated aboriginal people in Canada.

Secondly, and through this first point, this article develops an ontology of settler-colonialism that is broadly applicable to other studies of indigenous people. By employing the work of Althusser on Marxism, it assesses how the institutionalization of the ideologies and apparatuses of repression rationalize and essentialize the settler-colonial system at the global level. Settler-colonialism, as Glen Coulthard argues, is a comprehensive network of domination in a former colonial state (like Canada and the U.S.) that constantly reinstalls and renews the basis of its power through dispossession and the effacement of indigenosity. This is accompanied by both literal and figurative violence in the form of warfare and ethnocide.<sup>13</sup> Most importantly, because settler-colonialism could not tenably exercise physical destruction to foreclose indigenous resistance in the long term, and because the settler-state could not reasonably deny the ongoing physical presence of indigenous people, it unwittingly maintains a location in which negations like Deskaheh's may occur.



It is necessary, of course, to provide an overview of the conditions that prompted Deskaheh's contention for Haudenosaunee sovereignty. Prior to the conclusion of World War I, the Haudenosaunee of Canada at Grand River were

# The Battle of Wyoming, 1778: Legends of Atrocities

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During the American Revolution, the Colonials accused the British and Haudenosaunee forces of committing atrocities after the Battle of Wyoming, 1778. Reports detailing these horrific acts exploded in the colonial newspapers that supported the Patriot cause soon after the American's devastating defeat. These stories detailed how the enemy killed American troops who attempted to surrender instead of "giving quarter," or protection to those who laid down their arms.<sup>1</sup> The Patriots also alleged that the British and Haudenosaunee forces murdered prisoners of war, women, and children, and destroyed the Wyoming Valley settlements. As a result of these accusations, this battle earned the moniker, "The Wyoming Massacre." From this battle emerged the legends of the "Hatchet" and "Esther's Bloody Rock." In both cases, these stories tell tales of unnecessary brutality committed against American troops and noncombatants after the fighting ceased and the Americans surrendered. Since the war, historians attempted to uncover the truth behind these

stories, but there are still arguments about what occurred. Hence, the question remains: what really happened after the Battle of Wyoming? This study found that while some stories are true, the Patriot papers embellished many of the accounts, and a few reports are unfounded.

In the spring of 1778, Sir Henry Clinton, Commander-in-Chief of British Forces in North America, received orders to send five thousand troops to the Caribbean to defend their assets against the French.<sup>2</sup> This order severely diminished the number of troops available to subdue the rebellion in the colonies. To compensate for the loss in troop strength, the British relied more heavily on Native American and Loyalist forces.<sup>3</sup> One such unit that allied with Native American nations was a Ranger unit led by Colonel John Butler. It was Butler's Rangers and his Haudenosaunee allies, led by Onodowaga War Chief, Sayenqueraghta that rose to notoriety on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1778 for committing what Americans alleged as atrocious acts at the Battle of Wyoming.<sup>4</sup>

Butler's Rangers became a formalized unit in 1777 when John Butler received authorization to raise more Ranger troops after their success at the Battle of Oriskany.<sup>5</sup> In the spring of 1778, Major General Guy Carleton, Governor of the Province of Quebec, ordered Butler to recruit Haudenosaunee warriors to support his Rangers in their next mission.<sup>6</sup> From their headquarters in Niagara, Butler moved south to attack Patriot settlements in the Mohawk Valley of upstate New York and also in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania. Butler planned to eliminate Patriot support in these valleys, weaken the rebel forces, and also protect the Loyalist settlements in the area.<sup>7</sup> According to Anthropologist Anthony Wallace, before the British and their Haudenosaunee allies executed their campaign, they established informal rules of engagement. These rules prohibited unnecessary violence against rebels and the innocent women and children caught in the middle of their raids. The Haudenosaunee chiefs understood the importance of maintaining these rules of war,

Wallace explains, due to their intimate knowledge of British military culture.<sup>8</sup>

In June 1778, John Butler's Rangers and his Haudenosaunee allies advanced south by way of the Susquehanna River, to the Wyoming Valley. A detachment of Loyalists from the King's Royal Regiment of New York named the Royal Greens also supported Butler's troops. Butler's Rangers numbered about one hundred and ten men. The Haudenosaunee troops consisted of about four hundred Gayogohono, Onodowaga, and some Skarure warriors. These warriors were under the command of Sayenqueraghta, or Old Smoke, and his second in command, Gyantwahia, also known as Cornplanter.<sup>9</sup> The targets of this raid were three forts—Forty, Jenkins, and Wintermoot—built by the Wyoming Valley settlers for protection.

Butler's Rangers and the Haudenosaunee knew that the Wyoming Valley was a location that already sustained numerous conflicts between its settlers. The memory of these conflicts increased the tension between Butler's Rangers and their opponents taking refuge behind the Patriot fortifications. The disputes that erupted between the Connecticut "Yankee" and Pennsylvanian "Pennamite" settlers were a result of their attempts to settle in the Wyoming Valley. Both groups of settlers believed they were the rightful owners of the land because the proprietors representing them unknowingly purchased the same land at separate times from the Haudenosaunee.

As a result, this conflict over land led to a series of battles between settlers, known as the "Yankee-Pennamite Wars." Between 1763 and 1784, several deaths resulted from these battles.<sup>10</sup> The Susquehanna Company of Connecticut, in the front lines of the conflict, maintained that a 1662 charter granted them the land nineteen years before William Penn's charter.<sup>11</sup> With the onset of the American Revolution, the animosity between the Yankee and the Pennamite settlers remained strong. However, it

was the Yankees who held control of the valley. As a result, many Pennamite settlers joined the British military in hopes of regaining control of their lands with British support and protection.<sup>12</sup>

On June 30<sup>th</sup>, John Butler's Rangers and the Haudenosaunee arrived in the Wyoming Valley and positioned themselves at a point of high elevation with views of all three targeted forts. Butler then sent messengers to the forts demanding their surrender. Upon receiving Butler's ultimatum, Fort Jenkins and Wintermoot—the latter reportedly occupied by some Tories—quickly complied with the orders to surrender.<sup>13</sup> While Forty Fort, the largest of the forts and the most heavily fortified, refused to capitulate. Command of Forty Fort was under the leadership of Colonel Zebulon Butler, who had no family ties to John Butler, and Colonel Nathan Denison. Zebulon Butler, a soldier in the Continental Army, held much experience in battle and was an established leader of the Yankee claims to the Wyoming Valley. This experience made Zebulon the best choice to lead the Americans in their defense against John Butler and Sayenqueraghta.<sup>14</sup>

The force that Zebulon took command of consisted of settlers not already called to duty on the front lines of the American Revolution. Before John Butler's arrival, the settlers made multiple appeals to the Continental Congress to allow their local militia troops to return from the war to protect the settlements. Unfortunately, Congress rejected their appeal due to the need for troops to support Washington's plan to strike British forces currently evacuating from Philadelphia.<sup>15</sup> However, Congress allowed the settlers to raise their own militia with those able-bodied men not serving at the front. Fortunately, because Zebulon Butler was home on furlough from the Continental Army, he was able to take command of the hastily organized band of militia.<sup>16</sup>

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