

MOHAWKS OF TYENDINAGA RESERVE

By Mrs Susan Claus.

For many years before the Mohawks settled on the Bay of Quinte they lived along the Mohawk River in New York State. They were happy and enjoyed a life of hunting, fishing and farming their own land, and adopted the habits and manners of their white neighbours. They spoke English and Mohawk languages and were baptized by the Anglican Missionary.

They were the smallest group of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. One of their villages was close to Fort Hunter and Johnson Hall, the residence of Sir William Johnson, who had been superintendent of Indian Affairs for about 30 years. The Chiefs were Captains John Deserontyou, Aaron and Isaac Hill, and Captain Joseph Brant called Thayendanagea by his people.

Sir Wm. Johnson died suddenly in 1774, when the agitation ending in the civil war, known to us as the American Revolution was becoming very alarming. The administration of Indian Affairs was then carried on by Guy Johnson, his nephew and son-in-law and Daniel Claus another son-in-law. Their latest instructions from England advised them "that preserving the good will and affection of the Six Nations was an object they should never lose sight of."

About midsummer of 1775, Guy Johnson was warned that an attempt would be made to make him a prisoner by the Colonists, so he collected over a thousand Indians marched through the woods to Oswego, where he held a council. Here they decided to support the British Government and protect the navigation of the St. Lawrence and the Lakes, also to send a deputation of Chiefs and Warriors to Montreal to visit the Governor of Canada. The remainder returned to their homes. In the meantime they took part in several battles against the Colonists.

Later in July 1777, when their homes and property fell into the hands of the enemy, they took refuge in Canada with a large party of Loyalists who made their way through the wilderness. Col. Claus found a suitable spot in the woods near Lachine, where they built huts and were supplied with food and clothing during the winter. In the Spring they cleared land for cultivation. After spending seven winters in very cramped and uncomfortable quarters, many became ill and several died; they were eager to find a permanent place they could call their own. Here they remained waiting for instructions from General Haldimand (Asharegowa they called him), who had succeeded Carleton as Governor and Commander-in-Chief at Quebec. They finally secured from him in the name of the Crown, deeds of their lands on the north shore of the Bay of Quinte. Brant was dissatisfied and preferred settling at Grand River; he finally secured the large tract of land, 6 miles in width on each side of the river running into Lake Erie. At the last moment Capt. Isaac and some relatives resolved to join Brant.

On May 22nd 1784, under the leadership of Chiefs John Deserontyou, Aaron and Isaac Hill, they landed with their families in fifteen canoes on the shores of the Bay of Quinte, opposite the present rectory. Their first act after beaching their canoes, was to have a service of thanksgiving. There were no clergyman, but the patriots overturned a canoe and on it placed a white cloth, then the communion vessels and had prayers and a Mohawk hymn. Afterwards they planted a cross and a flagstaff on the spot.

About the year 1711 five Chiefs had visited Queen Ann and in 1712 the Queen built them a Church at Fort Hunter, sent them a large Bible, a Fair Linen Cloth and a solid silver Communion Service. It was about 1785 that the plate was divided; it consisted of seven pieces - 2 flagons, 2 chalices, 2 patens and one alms basin. To the Grand River band was given the alms basin and one each of the other pieces, also a large bible. To the Bay of Quinte, a flagon, paten and chalice. Each piece is inscribed "THE GIFT OF HER MAJESTY ANN, BY THE GRACE OF GOD OF GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE AND IRELAND, AND HER PLANTATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA, QUEEN TO HER INDIAN CHAPPEL OF THE MOHAWKS". This services was buried at Fort Hunter during the Revolution and remained there seven years. From LaChine a party headed by Capt. John Deserontyou returned to the Mohawk Valley, resurrected the plate and brought it back to Canada. On the Chalice is a dent, made when it was struck by a shovel.

For twenty-two years up to 1897, the communion service was safely kept by Mrs. John W. Hill, the grand daughter of Thayendaegea, whose mother was the original custodian. Robert Huron Hill, appointed by the Mohawk Councillors, is now the custodian. The Queen Ann set is used only on special occasions. A log church with a few windows and a door covered with deer skins, was built in 1784. The Church had a bell but no belfry, so the bell was hung on poles outside the Church. The Reverend John Stuart D.D., sent out by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and who ministered to the Mohawks at Queen Ann Chapel at Fort Hunter from 1770-1777, and fled with them to Canada, was appointed to charge of both Bands.

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In place of the little log Church, there are now two stone Churches, Christ Church and All Saints, comparing favorably with many city Churches. The first permanent rector was the Rev. Saltern Givins, 1830-1851. Christ Church was built in 1843, destroyed by fire on May 12, 1906, rebuilt in 1906-1907, and consecrated by Rt. Rev. William Lennox Mills, Lord Bishop of Ontario, on April 28, 1907.

In Christ Church over the Altar, which is a memorial to Rev. Givens, is a triptich, containing the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments in the Mohawk language. This was given by King George III to the first Church. He also gave the bell, and a Royal Coat of Arms, which was burned when the tower was struck by lightning some years ago and later replaced by Rev. Herbert Pringle.

The Altar Cross is in-laid mother-of-pearl on olive wood from the Mount of Olives, and was brought from Jerusalem by Mrs Karakwineh Johnson, daughter of Dr. Oronhyatekha. The Alter Desk, (being the gift of the Right Reverend Dr. Seager, Bishop of Ontario and later Bishop of Huron) is also made of Olive wood fro Jerusalem, and bears this information in Hebrew.

Over the west door of Christ Church is this inscription:

"Erected by the Mohawks in token of their preservation by the Divine Mercy MDCCCXLI." "

There was also a tablet at All Saints Church erected in 1884, which bears the following inscription:

"Fear God and honor the Queen, this tower was erected in grateful memory of Capt. John Deserontyou."

The beautiful Chancel window at Christ Church was placed there by Dr. Oronhyatekha in memory of his wife Deyoronseh.

The Chancel window at All Saints Church was place there by the Women's Guild in memory of the Guild Members.

A Memorial was erected in 1953 on the Council House Grounds by the Akwesasne Mohawk Counsellor Organization in memory of Deganawida, a Huron by birth, a Mohawk by adoption, founder of the Iroquois Confederacy. He was born near here sometime during the 15th Century. He gave his people the Great Peace-Law which unites them to this day.

In 1929, a Cairn was erected, by the Historical Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, with a bronze tablet recording the "Coming of the Mohawks" on May 22nd 1784. It was unveiled with due ceremony during the United Empire Loyalists Celebration that year.

Tyendinaga Mission School was built in 1882 with funds supplied by the New England Company. The building was used for a school (and a place of worship on Sundays) until June 1955 when it was given to the Canadian Anglican Church by the Band Council. Chief Sampson Green was instrumental in getting funds for the erection of this school.

There are now four well equipped schools from which many pupils enter secondary schools and a few go on to Universities. At the present time, there is one member studying for a Medical degree, one who has just completed several degrees in social work, and one Ordained as a Deacon in the Anglican Church.

The memorial to the War dead in Christ Church yard was erected by the Ka-Yon -Geh Club.

In 1958 a plaque was erected at Christ Church yard for the memory of Oronhyatekha, 1841-1907, renowned Mohawk Chief and orator. This memorial was erected by the Ontario Archaeologists Society.

The Mohawks of Tyendinaga Reserve are proud of their history and spiritual heritage left them by their forefathers, who settled along the shore of the Bay of Quinte one hundred and seventy-six years ago, "IN HONOR, LOYALTY, and FEAR OF GOD".

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