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**POLISHING THE SILVER COVENANT CHAIN: A Brief History of Some of the Symbols and Metaphors in Haudenosaunee Treaty Negotiations**

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Part 4

meeting as a reassurance that the current proceedings by the State of New York were in keeping with past practices – and therefore legal. In fact, New York State had already ratified the new Constitution (July 26) and a new government would be in place by March 4, 1789. Thus Governor Clinton was rushing ahead with negotiations – and holding a secret negotiation as well. Governor Clinton invited two Onondaga chiefs (Tehonwaghsloweaghte – Black Cap -- and Kakiktoton) and two chief warriors to meet in the commissioners' quarters. Clinton then told them:

Brothers! As it is my Intention at this Council Fire to consult our mutual Interest it is necessary that we should open our Minds to each other freely, that we may be able to determine what is best to be done.

You are sensible that the State has never wished to take your Lands from you. When the War [American Revolution] was over we immediately kindled up a Council Fire at this Place to renew the ancient Covenant and brighten the Chain of Friendship which had subsisted between our Forefathers and between you and us. We then cleansed it of the Rust it had contracted during the War. At that Time I told you that We did not covet any of your Lands, but if at any Time you wanted to dispose of any Part of them it was to be done according to the ancient Custom in the Presence of the Governor, who would always take Care to see that the Lands were properly described and you [were] honestly paid for them.

**1788, September 12.** The Onondaga leader Tehonwaghsloweaghte, Black Cap, addressed Governor Clinton and the Commissioners after the treaty was signed. Tehonwaghsloweaghte evokes the "Great Spirit" and speaks of "the ancient Custom," "Covenant," and "our American Brethren" without realizing that Governor Clinton only represents the State of New York, in contrast to the colonial governor and representatives such as Peter Schuyler who spoke with the authority of the Crown. It is also interesting that Tehonwaghsloweaghte defined Covenant as a "friendly Alliance," not a hierarchy. Had Tehonwaghsloweaghte realized that Clinton was speaking only for the State of New York and not for the United States, Tehonwaghsloweaghte might have said that the negotiations were establishing a *new* Covenant Chain.

The Great Spirit above has chosen out this Day for finishing the Business of the Council Fire, at which we have revived the ancient Custom between your Forefathers of New York and Albany on the one Part and the Onondagoes on the other Part, even so far back as the Time of Queder Corleaer [Quider Corlaer], als. [alias]

Peter Schuyler [a colonial official involved in Indian affairs from 1686 to 1724 and who served as acting governor from 1719 to 1720 ]...

Brothers!...

Our Children and Children's Children to the latest Generation, will look back to the Transactions of this Day. You have now secured to us and our Posterity what we consider as a Territory sufficiently large for us and all our Posterity to live upon, and every Privilege arising from our whole Territory we enjoy and shall continue to enjoy.

Brothers! We have this Day renewed our ancient Friendship and entered into solemn Covenant. Let all here present be Witness to it. No evil Spirit shall be able to break the Covenant which we have this Day completed; for Union begets Strength. An individual is like the single Stick which I hold in my hand: how easy is it broke

(then breaks the Stick in three Pieces and grasps them together) how weak when single & how strong when together. The Covenant we have entered into this Day will confirm and establish our friendly Alliance with our American Brethren forever.

**1788, September 12.** Governor Clinton then addressed Seneca warriors, a Seneca Clan Mother, and other Seneca women who have accompanied the Seneca men to Fort Schuyler (Fort Stanwix), where Governor Clinton and the Onondagas had almost closed the council. No Seneca chiefs were in the Seneca delegation, and Clinton used this to his advantage, to deal with the nations individually.

Brother! I and the Chiefs [Commissioners] who accompany me are very glad to see you and thank you for this Mark of Respect, and especially for the Visit from our Sister the Chief of the Governesses, and the Sisters who accompany her.... The Onondagoes and Oneidas have ... met us and we have settled Matters with the Onondagas to our mutual Satisfaction, & made a Covenant with them in such a Manner as will be most for their Good & prevent any Abuses in future against them.

As the Sachems and Chiefs of the Senecas are not present, it is not in our Power formally to renew the ancient Covenant and brighten the Chain of Friendship that has existed between us or to enter on or transact any Business with you our Brothers now present, but we are notwithstanding happy to see you and we wish that some of you would remain and be Witnesses to the Completion between us & the Onondagoes, so that you may always bear your Testimony the Fairness of the Transaction and be able to inform your Nation fit on your Return home.

**1788, September 16.** Governor Clinton addresses the Seneca warriors who had attended the conference at Fort Schuyler (Fort Stanwix). See also September 12 above. Clinton, as he does consistently, uses the imagery of the Covenant Chain to imply that his negotiations on behalf of New York State, and New York State alone, as the same as the colonial New York governor, when in fact the colonial New York governor spoke on behalf of the Crown, Britain's central government.

Brothers! Young Warriors of the Seneca Nation, open your Ears and hear a few Words I have to speak to you.

Brothers! When it was proposed to kindle a Council Fire at this Place, the Chiefs of the Six Nations were invited to it, and it was expected that they would have attended. The Business to be transacted was of great Importance to you all. As soon as we were informed that a Number of our disobedient and disorderly Children [that is, white citizens of New York] were among our Brethren of the Six Nations treating with them for their Lands contrary to our Laws and the ancient Custom of transacting Business between us, and attempting to cheat and deceive you, we determined to kindle up a Council Fire at this Place, to renew the ancient Covenant of Friendship that has so long subsisted between us, brighten the Chain of Friendship & to concert Measure as well for securing to you your Property...

To which the Senecas made the following answer [note how the Senecas clearly make the distinction that the Haudenosaunee are not part of New York State by telling Clinton that the problems of land fraud originated among "disorderly People of your own State"]:

Brother Governor with your Chiefs attend! You have now spoken to us. You have acquainted us with the Design of your kindling a Council Fire at this Place, which was to renew the ancient Covenant of Friendship subsisting between your Forefathers and ours, and that you would not have called us here at this Time on this Business, had not some disorderly People of your own State broken that Covenant by attempting to purchase our Lands without the Authority and Direction of your Chiefs, and contrary to our ancient Customs.... This Transaction being done agreeably to ancient Custom, has given us great Pleasure.

**1788, September 16.** Governor Clinton addressed the Oneidas at Fort Stanwix immediately after negotiating with the Onondagas, and in response the Oneida leader Oneyanha (Beach Tree, also known as Peter the Quarter Master) addressed Clinton and his commissioners. Note that Oneyanha evidently perceives Governor Clinton as coming from the State of New York – a separate political entity – when he says "Brother of the State of New York," and, referring to Clinton's commissioners, says "Your Governor has now opened your Minds [the commissioners' minds] to us [that is, the Oneidas]."

Brother of the State of New York & all the Chiefs here present with him, attend!

Your Governor has now opened your Minds to us... The Great Spirit has seen fit to give us a pleasant Day at which you have spoken of the ancient Covenant between your Forefathers and ours.

**1788, September 19.** Agwelentongwas (Good Peter), Oneida, at Fort Stanwix addressed Governor Clinton and his commissioners. Note that Agwelentongwas and the Oneidas, just like the Onondagas, do not realize that Governor Clinton, on behalf of those whom Agwelentongwas calls "the People of New York," is acting apart from the central authority of the United States under the Articles of Confederation. Agwelentongwas sees Clinton's role as a continuation of "the ancient Covenant of friendship" in which New York's governor was the Crown's representative and not a separate official acting independently of a central authority. Agwelentongwas also refers to all of the territory of the Six Nations as "our Country," clearly seeing that Clinton's citizens lived in a *different* country.

You remarked to us again the ancient Covenant of Friendship which subsisted between our Ancestors and yours, this Covenant was made between the People of New York and our Ancestors the Six Nations. This Covenant was interrupted for a short Time by the late War, but on the Return of Peace, you told us that we were the Proprietors of the Soil, and you restored even the others of the Six Nations, who had joined the British, to their former Possessions....

Brother! You further observed to us that the Perplexity and uncertain State of our Country now called forth your attention to your Great Council and that your Minds were much disturbed upon hearing in what Situation the Lands of us the Six Nations were in, from a Regard you had to the ancient Covenant existing between you and us; and that owing to the irregular and disorderly Conduct of some of your Children, even some good Men had been misled; and that it was in your Power and that you would punish the disobedient for their Conduct.

**1788, September 20.** At Fort Stanwix, Governor Clinton replies to Agwelentongwas (Good Peter), Oneida. Clinton again evokes the "ancient Covenant." He also refers to New Yorkers as "our people," clearly indicating that the Haudenosaunee were *not* a part of "our people."

You mention to us that a Voice had reached our Ears informing us that some of our People had without any Authority from us, obtained from you a Lease of your Lands, and you request us that we would first give our Advice and Sentiments as to the best Means for preventing the injurious Consequences which might arise from this Departure from the ancient Covenant between you and us....

Brothers! You know that at former Treaties we advised you not to dispose of your Lands to any of our People unless they had a License from the Governor to make Bargains with you for your Lands. We then also mentioned to you that this was the ancient Usage and Regulation between your Forefathers and ours....

**1788, February 19.** Treaty council at Denniston's Tavern, Albany, between the Cayugas and Governor George Clinton and New York State's Indian Commissioners. The Cayugas chose "the Oneida Chief Domine Peter [Good Peter, Agwelentongwas] their Mouth to speak for them. Domine Peter's speech included the following:

We thought it agreeable to the ancient Usage to take two Brothers of the Onondagas and Oneidas to this Place [Albany], where our Ancestors kindled a Council Fire, the Smoak of which reached the Heavens, and round which they sat and talked of Peace.

I observed at first, that I would only touch upon one even after another, and need I call your Attention to the Council Fires and Treaties held here by your and our Forefathers; they had one Head and one Heart. The Chain of Friendship was made of Silver, so that it could not rust. I need not mention these Occurrences to you.... Our Ancestors you know frequently met to brighten this Chain with a Design to see whether any Evil Spirit that disturbs the Peace of Brethren, shook it or sat upon it.

**1788, February 19.** Treaty council at Denniston's Tavern, Albany, between the Cayugas and Governor George Clinton and New York State's Indian Commissioners. Governor Clinton responded to the speech by the Oneida Chief Domine Peter [Good Peter, Agwelentongwas]. Governor Clinton noted:

I cannot but observe that we have never let go the Chain of Friendship that binds us together, and that we have strictly adhered to all our Treaties and faithfully observed the ancient Covenants that subsisted between us. The late War interrupted our Friendship for a while, but let me remind you of what happened after Peace. We then kindled a Council Fire at Fort Stanwix; I see here many on both Sides who attended there. Our Object was then to rub the Rust off the Chain of Friendship, to cover up the Ashes of the Dead, and to remove the Thorns and Briers which had sprung up in the Path.

**1789, February 21.** Treaty council at Denniston's Tavern, Albany, between the Cayugas and Governor George Clinton and New York State's Indian Commissioners. A Seneca, Thoneowas, gave a short speech, to which Governor George Clinton responded:

We kindled this Council Fire to consult on Matters for our mutual Good and to renew & strengthen the ancient Covenant of Friendship that subsisted between our Fathers. We claim no preeminence over you; we are Republicans, we hold that all men are equal.

**1790, June 14.** Treaty negotiations at Fort Stanwix between the Onondagas, Governor George Clinton, and the New York State Indian Commissioners, with some other Haudenosaunee attending. Governor Clinton addressed the Onondagas, noting that

he observed that being informed that Heats and Animosities prevailed among them, he was induced to kindle a Council Fire at this place at this Time, agreeable to ancient Usage, in order to interpose his friendly Services towards healing those Divisions and introducing Harmony among them. He then observed that after the Close of the War, which had for a Time unhappily interrupted our friendly Intercourse, he had taken the earliest Opportunity of Kindling a Council Fire at this same Place, to establish Peace, revive our ancient Friendship and rub off the Rust which the Covenant Chain had contracted in the Course of the War....

**1790, June 14.** Treaty negotiations at Fort Stanwix between the Onondagas, Governor George Clinton, and the New York State Indian Commissioners, with some other Haudenosaunee attending. After Governor Clinton addressed the Onondagas, *S'balongbyowane* or *Clear Sky* replied:

You have opened our Ears that we may listen to what you shall say at this Meeting designed to revive the Friendship which subsisted between our Ancestors, and brighten the Covenant Chain.

**1790, June 18.** Treaty negotiations at Fort Stanwix between the Onondagas, Governor George Clinton, and the New York State Indian Commissioners, with some other Haudenosaunee attending. At the close of the negotiations, Governor Clinton repeated his description of the 1784 negotiations at Fort Stanwix. This speech is, first of all, repetitious, but there is also a reference to the sacredness of the negotiations involving the Covenant Chain.

I kindled a Council Fire [in 1784] at this same place and I invited all our Brethren of the 5 Nations to attend it. The Object of that Meeting was ... to revive the ancient Friendship which had subsisted between our Forefathers, and to brighten the Covenant Chain....

[After reciting many details of recent negotiations, Clinton returned to the 1784 council at Fort Stanwix:] It will appear then from what I have related, that as soon as the War was over I kindled a Council Fire and invited our Brethren of the 5 Nations to I, to renew our ancient Friendship and brighten the Covenant Chain. This was agreeable to the ancient Usages of our Forefathers. These, Brethren, we considered as sacred, for they are the Result of Experience & founded in Wisdom.

**1790, June 18.** Treaty negotiations at Fort Stanwix between the Cayugas, Governor George Clinton, and the New York State Indian Commissioners, with some other Haudenosaunee attending. Note how both Fish Carrier and Clinton evoke the Great Spirit, affirming the seriousness of the negotiations.

First, the Cayuga leader Fish Carrier spoke to Governor George Clinton and the New York State Indian Commissioners:

The Great Spirit ... will have Justice done to each Party; when any Misunderstanding or Misrepresentation has interrupted their Peace and Friendship is again restored, it is agreeable to his Pleasure.

Governor Clinton replied to Fish Carrier:

Our mutual Thanks are due to the Great Spirit for having brought us together this Day and for inspiring us with such Dispositions towards each other, as to remove all Causes of Uneasiness and to establish Harmony and Friendship between us. You may rest assured that we will hold fast to the Covenant Chain, and that every thing we have promised shall be faithfully performed.

**1790, November 24,** at a council at Tioga Point (Athens, Pennsylvania), the closing speech by Red Jacket addressing the United States negotiator, Timothy Pickering. At this council, Pickering was given the Seneca name "Con-ne-sauty" (Sunny Side of a Hill). The Haudenosaunee, primarily Senecas, were complaining about the Phelps-Gorman Purchase at Buffalo Creek in 1788 by which these land speculators illegally purchased much of western New York, and the murder of two Senecas at Pine Creek, Pennsylvania. Pickering was also trying to quell passions among those Haudenosaunee who were advocating support for those Indian nations in the Ohio region who were resisting U.S. expansion. Pickering could only promise that the new Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790 would prevent illegal purchases in the future. Presents were given, in part to offer recompense for the

two murdered Senecas.

Brother, You have now begun to settle the affairs of the nation & brighten the Ch.[ain] of Fr[iendship]d. This has been the case since so many small council fires were kindled, that there were different ((ears) – interpreters)

and they did not know at one Council what had been done at another. Now we have brightened the Ch.[ain] of Fr[iendship]d & the business is begun upon a large scale; It is the mind of the Six Nations here that they should have the same interpreters (pointing to Joseph Smith and Jasper Parrish) at another treaty (if another should be held) as of this – for these know what has now been done here. It is our mind (& it was always the mind of our forefathers) when we find men who have faithful ears, & know the ways of Indians that they should attend to all our business in treaties with the U.[nited] States & the citizens thereof...

**1791, January 10**, in Philadelphia, a speech by Cornplanter, Half-Town, and Great Tree to President George Washington. This is an example of how the Haudenosaunee believed that the strength of Covenant Chain was dependent upon the *mutual* efforts of both the Haudenosaunee and whites.

The chain of friendship will now, we hope be made strong as you desire it to be. We will hold it fast; and our end of it shall never rust in our hands.

**1794, November 2**, at the negotiations that led to the Treaty of Canandaigua, a speech by Red Jacket to President Washington's representative, Timothy Pickering. This is an example of the imagery of rust on the Covenant Chain caused by the United States and the need to remove the rust. The United States wanted to keep the Haudenosaunee out of the war in the Old Northwest. The Haudenosaunee, for their part, wanted a return of the "Erie Triangle" at the northwest corner of that state that had already been purchased by Pennsylvania under shady circumstances. The Haudenosaunee were also intent on blocking a demand by the United States to build a four-mile long road between Cayuga Creek and Buffalo Creek.

Brother, -- You now represent the President of the United States, and when you spoke to us, we considered it as the voice of the fifteen fires. You desired that we would take the matter under our deliberate consideration and consult each other well, that where the chain was rusty, it might be brightened. We took General Washington by the hand, and desired this council fire, that all the [treaty boundary] lines....

Brother, -- We thought you had a sharp file to take off the rust, but we believe it must have been dull, or else you let it slip out of your hands. With regard to the four-mile path, we are in want of it on account of the fisheries; although we are but children, we are sharp-sighted, and we see that you want the strip of land for a road, that when you have vessels on the lakes, you may have harbors, &c. But we wish, that in respect to that land [the Erie Triangle], the treaty at Fort Stanwix may be broken [that is, be altered]. You white people have increased very fast on this island, which was given to us Indians by the Great Spirit; we are now become a small people, and you are cutting off our lands, piece after piece – you are very hard-hearted people, seeking your own advantages.

**1794, November 4**, at the negotiations that led to the Treaty of Canandaigua, another speech by Red Jacket to President Washington's representative, Timothy Pickering. This indicates how the Covenant Chain required compromise by both sides. By this point, both sides had made concessions in return for continuing the Covenant Chain. Pickering had given up American intentions to build the four mile road, a necessary concession if he was to succeed in keeping the Haudenosaunee out of the war in the Old Northwest. For their part, the Haudenosaunee realized that the Erie Triangle would not be returned. Red Jacket summarized these compromises, directing his comments to Pickering but as indicated by his addressing Pickering as "General Washington, also intending his comments for President George Washington:

General Washington, now listen; we are going to brighten the chain of friendship between the Six Nations and the Americans. We thank you for complying with our request in giving up the particular spot in dispute [the four-mile road].

Pickering recognized the compromises both sides had made in his response to Red Jacket:

There has been mutual condescensions [concessions], which is the best way of settling business."

**1794, between November 11 to 14: Timothy Pickering presents The George Washington Belt, also known as The George Washington Covenant Belt at Canandaigua.** The design of the belt, with human figures linking arms, clearly reflects the root word for "chain" – "arms linked together," such as the Onondaga

"dehudadnetsháus" meaning "they link arms." Thereafter, any mention of the Treaty of Canandaigua implies the Covenant Chain even when the words "Covenant Chain" are not used. The specific date on which the belt was presented is not known, but Timothy Pickering wrote to his wife Rebecca Pickering on November 12, 1794, noting the treaty was signed on November 11 and that it would take two more days to distribute all the goods and presents.

**1819, July 9.** A speech by Red Jacket during negotiations between the Haudenosaunee and the United States at the Buffalo Creek reservation. These negotiations represent the major point in time when the mutual respect of the Covenant Chain was entirely ignored by the United States, and that, tragically, Christian Haudenosaunee lost sight of the Covenant Chain as well. (A similar circumstance was also prompting Christian Oneidas to remove to Wisconsin, a removal that began in 1821. )

**Background:** In 1819, President James Monroe brought pressure on the largest nation of the Haudenosaunee, the Senecas of western New York. Behind all the maneuvering loomed the largest project in America: the Erie Canal. Monroe wanted all the Senecas, who were on eleven reservations of various sizes in western New York, to move onto one: the Senecas' Allegany Reservation. The most important land the Senecas were expected to surrender was the Buffalo Creek reservation. This reservation was the capital of the Confederacy after the Patriots destroyed the traditional capital at Onondaga in 1779 during the Revolution. (Onondaga would again become the official capital in 1847.) Adjacent to the Buffalo Creek reservation was a small white community called Buffalo, a town about to become extremely valuable once the Erie Canal was completed (the canal was begun in 1817 and completed in 1825). On July 9, 1819, at the Buffalo Creek reservation, the Seneca leader Red Jacket addressed white negotiators, protesting Monroe's pressures to give up the Buffalo Creek reservation and other Haudenosaunee lands. The Seneca leader wore an oval, silver peace medal given to him by President George Washington.

Excerpts of Red Jacket's speech follow. References to the Covenant Chain are in red, while other particularly firm statements are highlighted in green.

We made known to our great Father, that we wished to have a Talk. Application was made by our interpreter, but it was not complied with. We sent a messenger to brighten the chain of friendship with our great Father, but he would not meet around the Council-fire, and we were disappointed. We now expected that the Commissioner he has sent [Judge Morris S. Miller], came forward to brighten the chain of friendship, and to renew former engagements.

When we made a Treaty at Canandaigua [in 1794], we thought it was to be permanent, and to stand between us and the United States forever....

Your coming is to tell us of our situation; to tell us about our reservations; to tell us the opinion of the President that we must change our old customs for new ones; that we must concentrate ourselves, in order to derive the fair means you offer of civilization, and improvements in the arts of agriculture....

We had thought that all the promises made by one President were handed down to the next. We do not change our Chiefs as you do. Since these treaties were made with us you have had several changes of your President. And we do not understand why the treaty made by one President is not binding upon the other. On our part we expect to comply with our engagements....

You told us, where the country was surrounded by whites and in possession of Indians, where it was unproductive, not liable to taxes ....

As for the taxing of Indians, it is extraordinary. This was never heard of since the first settlement of America. The land is ours by the gift of the Great Spirit. How can you tax it?

The President has sent us word, you say, that it is our interest to dispose of our reservations. You tell us there is a fine tract of land at Alleghany. This too is very extraordinary. Our feet have covered every inch of that reservation. Such a communication as this has never before been made to us in any of our treaties. The President must have been disordered in mind, or he would not offer to lead us off by the arms [this is perhaps an ironic reference to the root word of the Covenant Chain, "arms linked together,"] to the Alleghany Reservation.

You have heard of our treaty with the United States [the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua].... Here is the belt of wampum that confirmed the treaty. This holds our hands together [a reference to the Covenant Chain]. Here too is the parchment. You know its contents. I will not open it. Now the tree of friendship is decaying; its limbs are fast falling off, and you are at fault....

The different claims you tell us of, I cannot understand. We were placed here by the Great Spirit for purposes known to him. You can have no right to interfere....

We will not part with any of our reservations.... [There are] white people on our reservation. It is my wish, and the wish of all of us, to remove every white man.... The Schoolmaster and the Preacher must [also] withdraw [to nearby white settlements]. The distance is short, for those who wish to go them. We wish to get rid of all the whites. Those who are now among us make disturbances. We wish our reservation clear of them.

**On July 10, 1819**, a delegation of Haudenosaunee visited Commissioner Miller. The delegation was headed by an opponent of Red Jacket, Captain Pollard (Ka-o-un-do-wand). Pollard was the son of a Seneca mother and a white trader, and had fought bravely during both the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Pollard was a devout Christian and wanted to assimilate more white ways while still living on Seneca lands. He claimed that a majority of the Seneca people did not agree with Red Jacket and wanted to apologize. Pollard's words indicate how many Senecas no longer wanted to follow the Covenant Chain:

One Sentence of the Speaker's hurt us very much. He intimated that the President was disordered in mind. It makes us very unhappy that he should have used this expression....

All the Chiefs of both parties excepting Red Jacket and Henry Abeel [the son of Cornplanter ] proposed making an apology.

[But:] The President wishes we should concentrate [on one reservation].... We took a view of this and concluded that the Speaker's answer was right. We all thought it was not right to part with the lands.

... We are divided among ourselves....

When I look back upon our ancestors, I see nothing to admire – nothing I should follow – that that induces me to live as they did. On the contrary, to enjoy life I find we must change our situation. We who are present have families and children and we have a respect for our children. We wish them to be enlightened and instructed, if we have not been. By this means their eyes will be opened. They will see the light, if we have not. We are getting old and cannot receive the instruction we want our children to receive: our children will know how to do business after we are dead and gone, and are under the dust; and they will bless us for giving them instructions [by white teachers], which their Fathers had been deprived of.

... You said we could not remain independent: we are sensible of this, and would undergo a gradual change: for instance, in case of crime now, we not independent – we are punished. We foresee that we cannot remain independent.

One cause of this division among us, is because one party will school their children, the other will not. Another cause is placing white men as tenants on our farms – I did so, because advised by a white friend, and to show our people how white men farmed. This was my reason. [Pollard's speech ended here.]

**1827, March 15.** Written petition to President John Quincy Adams from "the chiefs and principal men of the Seneca Tribes [sic] or Nation," including Red Jacket, protesting the illegality of an 1826 land purchase that the Senecas felt they had been forced to sign. The petition implies that the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua was a Covenant Chain because of references to "*rust*" and "tarnished." It is also probable that the phrase "bound themselves together" was a translation of the Iroquoian root meaning ""arms linked together." The following passage demonstrates how the language related to the Covenant Chain had become so common that specific mention of the term "Covenant Chain" was not necessary, even as the United States increasingly ignored the mutual, reciprocal nature of the Covenant Chain.

A great council fire was kindled, by which our father Washington and Red Jacket the Great chief of the six nations with many others set down and smoked the pipe of *peace*; at which time our Father entered into a treaty with the above chiefs and others and bound themselves together in the bonds of Friendship and there agreed that both parties should use their best endeavours that the same might be kept from *rust*. Yet if by unforeseen accidents the same should be tarnished by either party or should appear so to be, neither party should hastily turn to the right or left, but should make known his grievances to the other party, that wrongs might be righted and grievances adjusted.

**Conclusion.** Even as Red Jacket spoke in 1827, the Oneidas were being removed westward, a process that had begun in 1821. The traditional Haudenosaunee remembered the Covenant Chain, but the United States and their allies among the Christian Haudenosaunee increasingly and consciously chose to ignore the mutual support

required by the Covenant Chain at the same time the United States continually undermined the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua.

**In 1838**, debates among both Haudenosaunee and American citizens raged over the blatantly illegal and fraudulent treaty of Buffalo Creek. In 1840, the Quakers published a distributed an important book protesting the treaty entitled *The Case of the Seneca Indians in the State of New York Illustrated by Facts*. The title reveals how even the Quakers, whose predecessors had observed the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua, had come to believe that the Haudenosaunee were a part of New York State. Instead of appealing to the Covenant Chain or the Treaty of Canandaigua, the 256 pages of *The Case of the Seneca Indians in the State of New York Illustrated by Facts* is a legal brief framed around a western, white point of view. While it is sympathetic to the Senecas and other Haudenosaunee, its arguments are based on continuing the promotion of "the gentle voice of mercy, and the strong appeals to [white] justice."

**In 1889**, the New York legislature published the report of the "Special Committee to Investigate the 'Indian Problem' of the State of York." The legislature had authorized this committee in 1888 because in 1887 the United States Congress had passed the General Allotment Act (Dawes Act). The Allotment Act intended to break up the communal land holdings of Indian nations across the country by redistributing the lands among individual Indians and non-Indians so that private enterprise would be encouraged. However, because of preemptive land claims by the Ogden Land Company in New York, the act specifically exempted "the reservations of the Seneca Nation of New York Indians in the State of New York." The act did not mention the other Haudenosaunee in any context.<sup>74</sup> The 1889 report of the "Special Committee to Investigate the 'Indian Problem' of the State of York" is known as "the Whipple Report," after its chairman, J.S. Whipple. Under Whipple's leadership the committee took as its premise that New York State, not the federal government or the Haudenosaunee, possessed sovereignty in Indian affairs. The report includes all the treaties made by Governor George Clinton but omits the fact that Clinton saw those treaties as continuations of the Covenant Chain. The report also includes extensive transcripts of interviews with Haudenosaunee leaders as well as with white officials. However, in 877 pages of testimony (pages 405 to 1282), the Covenant Chain is not raised as a defense against New York claims of sovereignty. However, the Covenant Chain is mentioned on page 37 of the report's introduction where it is relegated to a quaint fact of distant history. As will be seen in the quote below, the Covenant Chain is mentioned within the context of the report's emphasis on the importance of New York over any central white power such as the Crown or the United States. The report ignored the fact that during the colonial period negotiations were held at Onondaga or other Mohawk and other Haudenosaunee towns. The report omitted mentioning meetings in locations such as New York City and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Instead, the report blatantly and erroneously claimed the following:

The city of Albany became the location of all negotiations with the Indians and came to be called "The ancient place of treaties," and here they continued to gather year after year to confer with the colonial governors, and "to brighten the chain of friendship with the English."

**The 1892 U.S. Extra Census Bulletin: The Six Nations of New York** does not cite the term "Covenant Chain" but the report notes that the obligations and relations established by the treaties of the Covenant Chain remained legal in 1892:

"Neither the state of New York nor the United States can legally break them up without the Indians' consent, or through conditions analogous to those of war. They have always been recognized as nations" and that "the conclusion is irresistible that the Six Nations are nations by treaty and law.

However, the report also noted

"the tendency of attempted legislation and very pronounced utterances from respectable sources have been in the direction of an abrogation of all existing treaties, with or without the consent of the Indians."

**In 1922, the Report of the New York State Indian Commission to Investigate The Status of the American Indian Residing In the State of New York known popularly as the Everett Report,**

challenged New York State's claims to sovereignty over the Haudenosaunee and stated that lands west of Rome, New York, were legally still Haudenosaunee lands. The Everett Report, like the Whipple Report, details how the commission gathered information and testimonies from the Haudenosaunee from the date of its authorization in 1919 to its completion in 1922. While none of the testimonies directly refers to the term "Covenant Chain," the spirit of the Covenant Chain is evident. For example, in a 1920 testimony, an Oneida, Joseph Johnson who lived on the Onondaga reservation declared firmly:

I live in the same land that my father and forefathers were born in and possessed thousands of years ago. . . . I say we Indians in the State of New York, as long as we have treaties with the State and the United States Government, we are a separate government surrounded by the United States. The Indians made their own laws right on this reservation. There was a time when no state or county authorities dared to cross that line.... I say, we are a separate country from the United States as long as we have treaties....

**Beginning in 1920**, the Covenant Chain was used as an image to assert Haudenosaunee rights by the Cayuga Chief Deskaheh (Hi-wyi-iss, Levi General). Thereafter, the symbolism of the Covenant Chain has been asserted by Haudenosaunee leaders. The Haudenosaunee and their non-Indian supporters gathered in 1944 at Canandaigua to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of Canandaigua, and in the decades that followed the commemorations at Canandaigua protested United States crimes against the Haudenosaunee and the continual violations of the Treaty of Canandaigua such as the Kinzua Dam.

Clearly, the spirit of the Covenant Chain and the spirit of the Treaty of Canandaigua cannot be separated. The Covenant Chain serves to remind people that the origins of this "chain" stretch back to 1613, and the Treaty of Canandaigua is just one manifestation of its powerful symbol, and the root of the Covenant Chain's meaning: **"They Link Arms" -- "Dehudadnetsháus"**

[Part 1](#) - [Part 2](#) - [Part 3](#)

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Elizabeth Tooker, "The League of the Iroquois: Its History, Politics, and Ritual" in Bruce Trigger, editor, *Northeast*, Volume 15 of the *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 436.

Here is a brief history of the Iroquois, the original inhabitants of the region in and around Montreal. Before European contact, the Haudenosaunee were horticulturalists, living year-round in villages made up of several hundred people. They were matrilineal, meaning that the basic unit usually consisted of the descendants of an individual woman. No one knows the exact founding date of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, though it is most often claimed to be around the mid-16th century. There was also the Silver Covenant Chain, another agreement between the British Crown and the Haudenosaunee. Among other treaties, in Montreal in 1701, the Haudenosaunee signed a treaty with the French in order to secure peace among Aboriginal nations. A New York History paper that says the 1613 treaty between the Dutch and the Haudenosaunee, first made public in 1968, is a forged document. Copyright: Attribution Non-Commercial (BY-NC). Download as PDF, TXT or read online from Scribd. He presented a brief exposition of the Iroquois and their early contacts with Europeans, and he discussed Dutch trading practices, stating that "in many cases" the traders were individuals who operated on their own and in other cases were financed by a second party. The Tawagonshi treaty, he suggested, was negotiated by two individuals who were probably financed by others. He devotes the remainder of his brief essay to the document's references to a silver chain."