

Retrospecting the Origins of the League of the Iroquois

WILLIAM A. STARNA

Professor Emeritus, State University of New York College at Oneonta
Adjunct Professor Emeritus, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario

IN A SELDOM-CITED SHORT ESSAY, William N. Fenton, the dean of Iroquois studies, candidly remarked, "As a young man I thought I would really be able to authenticate the League of the Iroquois and end up with some answers. As I've grown older, I've realized there are no answers; there are only probabilities."¹ Those probabilities, however, might be afforded more weight, even augmented, by reassembling and reexamining the data from which they were derived. Moreover, such an exercise might determine which of the probabilities so constituted is the most likely to reflect historical truth.

Scholarly writings, oral traditions, and other points of view on the genesis of the League, are legion. Most are measured historical or ethnological assessments of a level fully commensurate with the singular importance of the League to Iroquois people and colonial history, although there has been the occasional counterintuitive undertaking. But there remain many unanswered questions surrounding the League's origin, its timing, the purpose it was initially intended to serve, and its form. And perhaps along the way there needs to be a revisiting of a thought entertained years ago by Merle Deardorff, Fenton's longtime colleague in things Iroquois: Could the League have been "the unwitting creation of anthropologists following in the footsteps of Lewis Henry Morgan"?²

Of special note in this retrospection is that a source crucial to an understanding of the League comes not from the nearly two centuries of Dutch, French, and English records of colonization, the published

¹William N. Fenton, "Problems in the Authentication of the League of the Iroquois," in *Neighbors and Intruders: An Ethnohistorical Exploration of the Indians of Hudson's River*, ed. Laurence M. Hauptman and Jack Campisi, National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnological Service Paper No. 39, p. 266 (Ottawa, 1978).

²William N. Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy* (Norman, Okla., 1998), 713.

scholarly literature, or modern native tradition, but from the pen of a mid-eighteenth-century German-born Moravian missionary. Writing in his native language, Johann Christopher Pyrlaeus (1713–1785) put to paper what Sganarády, an elderly Mohawk man, had told him of the League's beginnings.

BACKGROUND

In December 1741, Bishop Nicolaus Ludwig, Graf von Zinzendorf, stepped off a ship that had taken him from Amsterdam to New York City. He traveled first to Philadelphia, then north to a newly formed Moravian community on the Lehigh River, upon which he bestowed the name Bethlehem. At a synod held in Oley, Pennsylvania, the following February, Zinzendorf decided to visit the mixed Indian community and Moravian mission at Shekomeko in New York's Hudson Valley.³ Arriving with his party in mid-August, he spent a week in conference with the Indians and several resident brethren. These deliberations resulted in the adoption of a list of resolutions, one of them being to extend the church's mission effort into New England and, by name, Albany. This meant looking into the disposition of the Mohawks. Two weeks earlier at a chance meeting with some of their headmen at interpreter and Indian agent Conrad Weiser's home in Tulpehocken, Zinzendorf had made arrangements to visit all six of the Iroquois nations.⁴

To initiate the Moravians' missionary endeavor among the Mohawks, Brother Christian Heinrich Rauch was directed to travel from Bethlehem to Albany, and thence into the Mohawk Valley. He was to discover whether he might be permitted to live among these native people and learn their language and, perchance, tell them something of Jesus Christ. His efforts presumably would pave the way for the Moravian brethren Zinzendorf intended would follow. Rauch's journey, begun at the end of January 1743, took him first to the Mohawk village of Tionondoroge (var.) and adjacent Fort Hunter, the residence of the Reverend Henry Barclay, then west to two other Mohawk communities, one near present Fort Plain and that of Canajoharie opposite the mouth of East Canada Creek.⁵ Following several unproductive encounters with

³Records of the Moravian Mission among the Indians of North America. Microfilm, 40 reels. Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, Pa., 26/211/5/1, Dec. 1741, Jan. 1742. Hereafter cited as *RMM* (reel/box/folder/item number, and date).

⁴William C. Reichel, ed., *Memorials of the Moravian Church* (Philadelphia, 1870), 32–33, 57. Zinzendorf never visited any of the Iroquois communities, although several other Moravians did. See William M. Beauchamp, ed., *Moravian Journals Relating to Central New York, 1745–66* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1916).

⁵An unknown but small number of Mahicans also resided in Tionondoroge.

the Indians, Rauch returned to Albany only to learn that the authorities were hot on his trail because he did not have a pass to travel in the area. He hastily beat a retreat to Shekomeko, arriving there without further incident at the end of February.⁶

At the same time that Rauch was in the Mohawk Valley, Johann Christopher Pyrlaeus sat at a table in Conrad Weiser's home taking from him lessons in the Mohawk language. Following three months of intensive study, he and Susanna, his wife, traveled to Shekomeko, with plans to go to the Mohawks. After conferring with Rauch about his recent experience, the Pyrlaeuses began their journey the last week of June 1743. As had Rauch before them, they stopped first at Fort Hunter for a meeting with Rev. Barclay.

Barclay was on his guard, as the Moravians were widely believed to be papists, a distinct disadvantage in the anti-Catholic colony of New York. He was at first reluctant to grant Pyrlaeus permission to travel farther west, maintaining that any such request should be made directly to his superiors at the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. But Barclay's resistance was soon assuaged by his admiration for Pyrlaeus's Mohawk language skills; he admitted that his own attempts to learn the language had been less than successful. The Indians at Fort Hunter were equally impressed, voicing astonishment at Pyrlaeus's ability to speak and, in turn, understand them. Having overcome the language barrier, and convincing Barclay that neither he nor his religion was a threat, Pyrlaeus and Susanna continued their journey. Thirty miles upriver from Fort Hunter they came to Canajoharie, taking rough and ready lodging with an impoverished farmer nearby, sleeping on an earth floor and bedeviled by mosquitos. Nothing is known about their visit with the native residents of that place. What may have been an attempt to travel on to Onondaga, however, was thwarted by an Indian who advised them that unless they were traders or licensed, they could not proceed. Pyrlaeus and Susanna made their way back to Shekomeko.⁷

Sometime in early to mid-July, Pyrlaeus is reported to have returned to the valley accompanied by Christian Frederick Post, the errant Moravian who later became entangled in Indian-colonial politics. A record of their trip has yet to be discovered. The same is true of Pyrlaeus's third visit to Canajoharie in August, when he took with him Brother

⁶RMM 29/221/4/4, n.d.

⁷Pyrlaeus recounts his journey to the Mohawks in his so-called "Treatise." RMM 29/221/21/1, 1739–1751. However, he tells a somewhat different story in his *Lebenslauf*, an autobiographical memoir he composed in 1785, some forty years after the fact. See the note that follows.

Anton Seiffert.⁸ The object of all of these comings and goings was to settle a few Moravians among the Mohawks. Those plans, however, did not materialize. But that does not end the episode.

FIRST RECORD

It was in all likelihood on one of his journeys to the Mohawk Valley that Pyrlaeus collected from an Indian he encountered information that looms large in the history of the Iroquois people and, in particular, in understanding the origins of their League, that celebrated alliance formed of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas. Written in a neat hand in German script on two manuscript pages amidst the more than five hundred pages of a Mohawk language dictionary he had compiled, Pyrlaeus's words stand today as the earliest documented account of the League's beginnings and its composition. Translated into English and first published by a fellow Moravian, John Heckewelder, in 1819, they have had a considerable impact on subsequent studies of this cultural phenomenon. What Pyrlaeus recorded has been cited and recited over the last two centuries by nearly every major scholar of Iroquois history and ethnology save one—curiously, the estimable Lewis Henry Morgan—who in 1851 published the first scientific treatment of an American Indian people, *League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee or Iroquois*.

John Heckewelder (1743–1823) arrived in Bethlehem from London in April 1754. Several years later he was recruited by Christian Post to assist him with the Delaware Indian mission in western Pennsylvania. His vocation chosen, Heckewelder continued missionary work in Pennsylvania and the Ohio country until 1810, when he retired to Bethlehem. He soon after turned to writing, producing his history and ethnological treatise on the Delaware Indians.⁹ Although Heckewelder discussed Pyrlaeus's brief report on the origins of the Iroquois League at several

⁸The sole reference to the Pyrlaeus-Post journey into the Mohawk Valley is in the so-called "Master Diary," cited here, that was kept by Brother Gottlob Büttner, stationed at the time in Shekomeko, who reports that the two returned to Shekomeko on 6 August 1743. *RMM* 1/111/1/1, Dec. 1739–July 1746; 26/211/5/1, 1738–1744. The journey is not mentioned in Pyrlaeus's *Lebenslauf* or in the Bethlehem Diary for 1743. Pyrlaeus and Seifert left Shekomeko for the Mohawk Valley two days later, on 8 August, with the intention to go on to Onondaga; however, in his *Lebenslauf*, Pyrlaeus reports that they were warned off by an unnamed Indian headman and a local settler. "Lebenslauf des Bruders Johann Christoph Pyrläus, heimgegangen in Herrnhut den 28. Mai 1785," in *Nachrichten aus der Brüder-Gemeine* (Gnadau, 1785), 57; Kenneth G. Hamilton, trans. and ed., *The Bethlehem Diary, Volume I, 1742–1744* (Bethlehem, Pa., 1971).

⁹John Heckewelder, *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States* (1819; repr., New York, 1971).

points in this work, it is the text of a footnote on page 56 that is cited by historians. It reads as follows:

The Rev. C. Pyrlaeus, in his manuscript book, page 234 [*sic*], says: “The alliance or confederacy of the Five Nations was established, as near as can be conjectured, one age (or the length of a man’s life) before the white people (the Dutch) came into the country. *Thannawage* was the name of the aged Indian, a Mohawk, who first proposed such an alliance.” He [Pyrlaeus] then gives the names of the chiefs of the Five Nations, which at that time met and formed the alliance, viz.: “*Toganawita*, of the Mohawks; *Otatschéhta*, of the Oneidas; *Tatotarho*, of the Onondagas; *Togaháyon*, of the Cayugas; *Ganiatarió* and *Satagarúyes*, from two towns of the Senecas, &c.,” and concludes with saying: “All these names are forever to be kept in remembrance, by naming a person in each nation after them,” &c., &c.¹⁰

Heckewelder offers additional detail from Pyrlaeus’s account elsewhere in his book:

The Rev. Mr. Pyrlaeus, in his notes, after fixing as near as he could the time when the Five Nations confederated with each other, proceeds in these words: “According to my informant, Sganarady, a creditable aged Indian, his grandfather had been one of the deputies sent for the purpose of entering into a covenant with the white Europeans; they met at a place since called Nordman’s Kill, about four miles below where afterwards Albany was built, where this covenant of friendship was first established, and the Mohawks were the active body in effecting this work.”¹¹

According to Heckewelder, the meaning of Pyrlaeus’s statement extended beyond that of a relatively straightforward story of the League’s genesis and its basic components. Relying in great part on the histories written by Moravians George Henry Loskiel and David Zeisberger, Heckewelder took the view that Pyrlaeus had contributed one more critical piece of evidence to explain why and under what circumstances the Iroquois had decided to label the Delaware Indians “women,” in effect changing their status from warriors to mediators whose interests would then be devoted only to “pacific employments.” In brief, Heckewelder argued that the label had been applied early in the seventeenth century, shortly after the arrival of Europeans and just prior to the almost certain defeat of the Iroquois by a combined force of Delawares,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56n1. The correct page number in Pyrlaeus’s manuscript is 235, but this is no mere quibble. Every source consulted where the footnote from Heckewelder is quoted includes the erroneous page number, suggesting that not one scholar has examined the original manuscript and the accuracy of Heckewelder’s translation.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

Mahicans, and others; that the Dutch bore direct responsibility for the plot, or at least had been the instigators; and that the Dutch had convened a grand council of Delawares and Iroquois near Albany, where the arrangement was formalized through ceremony and the exchange of wampum.¹²

Nothing of what Loskiel, Zeisberger, or Heckewelder alleged about these events is confirmed by modern histories; that is, Pyrlaeus's account is wholly unrelated to the Delawares, their being called "women," or wars between the Iroquois and their Algonquian neighbors. But there are other problems, the first and foremost being Heckewelder's faulty translation and then his reporting of what Pyrlaeus had written.

What follows is the German-language transcription and then translation of the excerpt in question from Pyrlaeus's "*Lexicon der Maquaischen Sprachen* [—] A Dictionary of the Mohawk Language," compiled between 1743 and about 1748:¹³

Transcription:
[235]

Der Friedens Bund zwischen denen 5 Nationen, die deswegen Aquanoschióni, *i.e.* die ein Hauß, eine Familie ausmachen, die Allürten, genennet werden ist ein Manns Leben zuvor ausgerichtet worden, ehe die weisen Leute *Albanien* anbauten oder vielmehr zuerst ~~daselb~~ in derselben Gegend gesehen worden. Laut dem Bericht eines glaubwürdigen alten Indianers Sganarády genannt; dieses Indianers Groß Vater hieß Tokaháyon,¹⁴ und der war einer von denen *Deputirten*, welchen die *Mohax* Indianer sendeten, mit denen weisen (Europaern) den Bund der Freundschaft aufzurichten. Der Ort der Zusammenkunft war bey der *Nordmanns Kill* 4 Meilen unter dem Plaz, wo *Albanien* hernach ist hingebauet worden, daselbst kamen die *Mohawks* zuerst hin zur Aufrichtung des Bundes.¹⁵

Die Nahmen derer 5 besonderen *Deputierten* Hauptleute der Nationen, welche den *Nationen* Friedens Bund errichtet haben[:]

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Die <i>Mohax</i> sendeten | Toganawíta |
| 2. Die <i>Oneider</i> - - | Otatschéchte |

¹²Ibid., 56–63. See generally Loskiel, *History of the Mission*; Archer Butler Hulbert and William Nathaniel Schwarze, eds., "David Zeisberger's History of the Northern American Indians," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 19 (1910): 1–189.

¹³American Indian Manuscripts, MS 497.33 P99. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia. Transcription and translation by Corinna Dally-Starna.

¹⁴In the margin, marked for insertion here: Diesen Nahmen hatte vorher schon einer von seiner Freundschaft gehabt. Er war aber nach seinen Ableben diesen *Indianer* beygelegt worden, um ihn zu *propagieren*.

¹⁵In the margin: Thannawáge ist derjenige alte *Indianer*, welcher den Bund den *Nationen* vorgeschlagen[.] Ein Maquaischer. *v. pag.* 302.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 3. Die <i>Onontager</i> - - | Tatotárho | |
| 4. Die <i>Gajuquer</i> - - | Togaháyon | |
| 5. Die <i>Senequer</i> - - | Ganniatarío ¹⁶ | |
| | | and |
| | | Satagarúuyes ¹⁷ |

Und weil die *Mohawks* die ersten gewesen sind, die im Bund getreten, so ist ihr *Titul* im Rath Tgarihógu, und heißen diese Nation den *Bruder*.
*verte*¹⁸

[236]

Die *Oneider* nennen sie Niharuntagóa
und halten ihn vor den älteren Sohn.¹⁹

Die *Senecker* nennen sie ꝑSonnanwantówane
und halten sie vor die jungen Söhne.²⁰

Die *Tuscarorer* nennen sie Tuscaróro
und halten sie vor den jüngern Sohn weil sie zuletzt in die *Allianz*
getreten sind.

Onontágo heist Sagochsanogéchte
in onontágo [blank] sagochsanogechtége

Die Aquanoschioni heißen die $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{Delawares} \\ \textit{Mabicander} \end{array} \right\}$ Niockwát[o]
d. i. *cousins*, oder Geschwister Kinder. *vid.* 217²¹

Die Aquanoschioni heißen die Engländer Unguagã,
d. i. unsere jüngere Brüder | oder auch Untattéco.

Der *Chief* in onontágo heißt s. *Indianer* Sagogã i.e. meine jüngeren
Brüder.

Onassatéko (i.e. zünd die feder an) so heist ein *Chief* in onontágo.

Oziragéllio heist des vorigen s. ältester Bruder

[. . .]

Translation:

[235]

The peace alliance between the 5 nations, called for that reason Aquanoschióni, i.e., those who make up a house, a family, the allies, was formed one man's life ago, before the white people built Albany, or rather, were first seen ~~there~~ in that area. According to the account of a credible old Indian named Sganarády, this Indian's grandfather

¹⁶In the margin: von ihrer Stadt, Onuchgarritáwy.

¹⁷In the margin: von der Stadt, Dionenhogaráwe.

¹⁸In the margin: Lehanton [Lahonton], p. 77. Danoncaritaoni, *a Town, it. Thegaronhies*, auch *a Town*.

¹⁹In the margin: Tsonontówane.

²⁰In the margin: Totirechróhne, die *Tutelars*, *vid. p.* 487.

²¹In the margin: Sagochwáta m. *cousins*.

was called Tokaháyon²² and he was one of those deputies who the *Mohax* Indians had sent to form an alliance of peace with the whites (Europeans). The location of this meeting was near the Normanskill, 4 miles below the place where Albany was later built, to which place the *Mohawks* first came for the formation of the alliance.²³ The names of the 5 special chiefs who were the deputies of the nations that had formed the peace alliance [are]:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. The <i>Mohax</i> sent | Toganawíta |
| 2. The <i>Oneider</i> - - | Otatschéchte |
| 3. The <i>Onontager</i> - - | Tatotárho |
| 4. The <i>Gajuquer</i> - - | Togaháyon |
| 5. The <i>Senequer</i> - - | Ganniatarío ²⁴ |

and
Satagarúuyes²⁵

And because the *Mohawks* had been the first to enter the alliance, their *titul[us]* [title] in council is Tgarihógu, and this nation is called the brother.

*verte*²⁶

[236]

The *Oneider* they call Niharuntagóa
and consider him the older son.²⁷

The *Senecker* they call TsSonnanwantówane
and consider them the young sons.²⁸

The Tuscarorer they call Tuscaróro
and consider them the younger son, for they were the last to have
entered the alliance.

Onontágo is called Sagochsanogéchte
in onontago [blank] sagochsanogechtége

The Aquanoschioni call the $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{Delawares} \\ \textit{Mahicander} \end{array} \right\}$ Niockwát[o]
that is, *cousins*, or siblings' children. *vid.* 217²⁹

The Aquanoschioni call the English Unguagã,
that is, our younger brothers | or also Untattéco.

²²In the margin, marked for insertion here: 'This name was already carried by one of his kin before. However, after his death, it was bestowed upon this Indian in order to propagate it'.

²³In the margin: 'Thannawáge is the old Indian who had suggested the alliance to the nations—a Mohawk, *v. pag.* 302'.

²⁴In the margin: 'From their town Onuchgarrítáwy'.

²⁵In the margin: 'From the town Dionenhogaráwe'.

²⁶In the margin: 'Lehanton [Lahonton], p. 77. Danoncaritaoni, a *Town*, *it.* Thegaronhies, also a *Town*'.

²⁷In the margin: "Tsonontówane."

²⁸In the margin: 'Totirechróhne, the *Tutelars*, *vid.* p. 487'.

²⁹In the margin: 'Sagaochwāta m[eans] *cousins*'.

The *chief* in onontágo calls his Indians Sagogã,
 that is, my younger brothers.
 Onassatéko (i.e., set the feather on fire) such is a *chief* called in
 onontágo.³⁰
 The eldest brother of the one before is called Oziragéllio.³¹
 [. . .]

DOCUMENTING THE LEAGUE

The founding of the Iroquois League and its timing, along with the League's structure, workings, and place in history, have been subjects of great interest to native and non-native historians, ethnologists, and others for many decades.³² The purpose here, however, is not to repeat, emend, or furnish a critique of what has been written. It is instead to follow the trail of documents and related lines of evidence having to do with the League and, on that footing, to suggest an alternate view of its inception and evolution.

Despite the wide range of available estimates, the consensus view posits the League's beginnings from sometime in the late fifteenth, well into the sixteenth, century.³³ The explanations behind its formation are expressed in the League tradition—the Deganawidah epic of the Iroquois—and also within the framework of modern scholarship, that is, in history, ethnological theory, and archaeology.

³⁰Despite the difficulty in explaining linguistically how “ca-” came to replace “o-” in this name, “Onassatéko” is probably the noted Onondaga headman Canasatego. See William A. Starna, “The Diplomatic Career of Canasatego,” in *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania*, ed. William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter, 144–63 (University Park, Pa., 2004).

³¹Elsewhere Canasatego's brother's name is spelled “Zila Woolien,” “Zila Woolie,” and “Zillawoolie.” *Ibid.*, 145.

³²The literature on the Iroquois League is extensive. The best and most authoritative discussion is in Fenton, *Great Law*, chaps. 3–6 and works cited therein. See also Elisabeth Tooker, “The League of the Iroquois: Its History, Politics, and Ritual,” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 15, Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger, 418–41 (Washington, D.C., 1978); Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992); Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies* (New York, 1984).

³³Fenton, *Great Law*, 66–73. See also Dean R. Snow, *The Iroquois* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 60; Robert D. Kuhn and Martha L. Sempowski, “A New Approach to Dating the League of the Iroquois,” *American Antiquity* 66.2 (2001): 301–14. An unhelpful account of the League's genesis is Barbara A. Mann and Jerry L. Fields, “A Sign in the Sky: Dating the League of the Haudenosaunee,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 21.2 (1997): 105–63. Fenton may have got it right when he wrote, “The whole search for an exact date of the formation of the Iroquois [League] seems to be nonsense.” Fenton, “Authentication of the League,” 266.

For Iroquois people there are two “great public utterances” emblematic of and essential to their culture history. The first is the cosmological myth of the Earth Grasper—the Woman Who Fell from the Sky—which describes how the earth, its people and all other living things, spirit forces, and celestial bodies were created. The second is the Deganawidah epic or the message of the Peacemaker, the origin story of the League of the Iroquois. In its most elemental form it tells how the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas ceased their feuding and wars by accepting and abiding by the Peacemaker’s message and then uniting in the Great Peace.³⁴

In its several versions the epic explains how Deganawidah, a figure with supernatural qualities and born of a virgin, brought an end to blood feud and warfare, corrupt government, and sorcery among the Iroquois, who at the time were living in horticultural villages scattered east to west across present New York State. His ally in this endeavor was the resolute but sorely afflicted Ayonhwathah (Hiawatha), an Onondaga headman. The two faced a formidable obstacle to their mission in the form of Adodarhonn (Thadodaho), a malignant and mercurial Onondaga shaman. Together, or perhaps as one and the same person, Deganawidah and Ayonhwathah reformed Adodarhonn and established the League.³⁵

When Adodarhonn had been persuaded to join in the Great Peace, a grand council was arranged of the headmen from among the Iroquois villages. It is generally understood that the outcome of deliberations at this assembly was the creation of the bylaws of the League or, as it also came to be called, the Iroquois Confederacy; the naming and installation of League chiefs whose offices were distributed permanently but unevenly among the five nations; and the formalization of essential ceremonies and customs, the most important of which was the Condolence Council, during which a chief who had died was mourned and a new chief raised in his place.³⁶

³⁴Fenton, *Great Law*, 51, and chaps. 3–6. The most complete version of the epic is Hanni Woodbury, ed. and trans., with Reg Henry and Harry Webster, *Concerning the League: The Iroquois League Tradition as Dictated in Onondaga by John Arthur Gibson*, Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics, Memoir 9 (Winnipeg, 1992).

³⁵N.B. Nontechnical spellings of chiefs’ names not cited to a specific source, as well as the occasional technical spelling, are from Tooker, “League,” 424–25. Otherwise, and unless noted, spellings and associated diacritics are as they appear in the source cited. In versions of the League legend, Ayonhwathah is described as an Onondaga émigré, a Mohawk, or a Huron. Fenton, *Great Law*, 74.

³⁶The total number of League chiefs, customarily referred to in the literature as “sachems,” whether as prescribed by the Deganawidah epic or as demanded by the political realities of the colonial period, is not specified in any written record until Lewis Henry Morgan, who, in the mid-nineteenth century, listed fifty with their titles. Lewis Henry Morgan, *League*

Social theorists have most often viewed the genesis and purpose of the League to be an example of political confederation, the underlying reasons for which were threats from encroaching Europeans and, frequently joining with them, the Iroquois' native foes. It has also been suggested that the alliance was formed as a quasi-militaristic means for

of the Iroquois (1851; repr., New York, 1962), 64–65. Many scholars, with virtually no justification save tradition, project this same number of chiefs deep into history to the very dawn of the League. See Daniel K. Richter, "Ordeals of the Longhouse: The Five Nations in Early American History," in *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600–1800*, ed. Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell, 14–15 (Syracuse, N.Y., 1987). For examples of this projection see Fenton, *Great Law*, chaps. 3–6 and the literature cited therein; Tooker, "League"; Richter, *Ordeal* and "Ordeals"; Snow, *Iroquois*; Wallace, *Death and Rebirth*; Matthew Dennis, *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993); Barbara Graymont, ed., *Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607–1789, Volume VIII, New York and New Jersey Treaties, 1683–1713* (Bethesda, Md., 1995), xxvii–xxviii. A particularly exaggerated, plethoric portrayal of the League is Robert A. Williams Jr., "Linking Arms Together: Multicultural Constitutionalism in a North American Indigenous Vision of Law and Peace," *California Law Review* 82 (1994): 981–1049. In "Iroquois Sachems: Their Names and Numbers," a paper presented at the 1977 Conference on Iroquois Research, I reported that a search of E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of New York; Procured in Holland, England, and France by John R. Brodhead*, 15 vols. (Albany, N.Y., 1853–87), had yielded well over twelve hundred names of Indians who were identified as "sachems," representing something less than seven hundred persons. Nine of the names matched those found on Morgan's roster; fifteen were traceable to lists compiled by Horatio Hale, *The Iroquois Book of Rites* (1883; repr., Toronto, 1972) and William N. Fenton, "The Roll Call of the Iroquois Chiefs: A Study of a Mnemonic Cane from the Six Nations Reserve," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections* 111.15 (1950): 1–73. Moreover, the names rarely repeated through time; that is, there was little indication that, in conformance with putative League orthodoxy, names had been perpetuated or "passed down" following the death of a "sachem," which points to an ad hoc recognition or designation of such headmen. Fenton, *Great Law*, 11, has suggested that because League chiefs usually were represented in councils by appointed speakers, their names were rarely recorded. Graymont, *Indian Documents*, xxviii, faults Dutch and English officials ignorant of the Iroquois political system. Few scholars, it seems, have entertained the thought that perhaps the League as described by Morgan simply did not exist in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Complicating matters is the meaning of *sachem* and the manner in which it was ascribed to Indian men by colonial officials. The word is from the Proto-Algonquian **sa:kima:wa* which translates simply 'leader'. Kathleen J. Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England, 1500–1650* (Norman, Okla., 1996), 249n3. The title sachem came to be applied to Iroquois headmen, although native words for such leaders are *rakowa:neh* (Mohawk) 'he is a great one' and *rahsemmowa:neh* (Mohawk) 'his name is great'. League chiefs, as described by J.N.B. Hewitt in 1920, were *roya:nehr* (Mohawk) 'he is a chief'. This word is attested in various forms from the late seventeenth century and refers to 'a considerable man or woman'. Early in the eighteenth century it meant 'the ancients, councilors, ancestors'. Fenton, *Great Law*, 199, citing Hewitt 1920, Bruyas 1863, and Laitau 1924. In the end, it is impossible to know the precise meaning behind the labeling of presumptive leaders as "sachems" by colonial scribes or by Indians themselves. Were these persons simply village headmen or something more than that, perhaps League chiefs? Answers to these questions may lie in the record of meetings between the Iroquois and colonial officials. For example, appearing before a tribunal at Fort Orange in 1658 were "the eldest Sachems of the *Maquas*, 15 in number." Charles T. Gehring, trans. and ed.,

interior groups to gain access to trading opportunities to their east, that is, nearer European outposts. Others, however, view the League as the end product of a revitalization movement, imbued with religious overtones and culminating in social and political transformation. Finally, it has been proposed that the League evolved from a loosely organized ceremonial system shared by Iroquois communities. At its core was a funeral rite—the Condolence—that over time became a vehicle for political meetings, functioning as it did to bring together village leaders. The underlying myth speaks to the journey of a culture-hero, Degana-widah, who brought a plan of peace to the warring Iroquois. Out of this reformation emerged a confederacy that called for the establishment of a hereditary council of fifty chiefs from the five Iroquois nations appointed by clan matrons, a decision-making process based on consensus, and a political and ceremonial protocol rooted in the kinship structure and worldview of the people.³⁷ Throughout, the question arises as to what came first: the ideology leading to confederation, the confederation to be subsequently justified by the ideology, or a complex mix of both processes. Equally intriguing is to what degree organizing the

Fort Orange Court Minutes 1652–1660 (Syracuse, N.Y., 1990), 400. According to native theory, Lewis Henry Morgan, and those historians who followed him, there were and are just nine Mohawk sachems or League chiefs. In 1673 “more than sixty of the oldest and most influential sachims” from the five Iroquois nations met with Count de Frontenac at present Kingston, Ontario. Twenty years later eighty Iroquois “Sachims” convened with New York officials at Onondaga. O’Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 9:103, 4:62. Native theory and the same historians, however, set the number of League chiefs at fifty.

³⁷The terms “myth” and “tradition” are used interchangeably in the literature on the Deganawidah epic, a practice followed here. Fenton, *Great Law*, sometimes used “legend.” On the genesis and purpose of the League see *ibid.*, 71–73; Bruce G. Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660*, 2 vols. (Montreal, 1976), 1:162–63; Anthony F. C. Wallace, “The Dekanawidah Myth Analyzed as the Record of a Revitalization Movement,” *Ethnohistory* 5 (1958): 118–30; *idem*, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York, 1969); William A. Starna, Jack Campisi, and Laurence M. Hauptman, “Iroquois Confederacy,” in *Native America in the Twentieth Century: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Mary B. Davis, 278–79 (New York, 1994). In my 1977 paper “Iroquois Sachems,” cited in the previous note, I hypothesized that the League may have operated as two coexistent parallel forms: (1) a ritual League with a fixed roster of fifty sachems whose responsibility it was to maintain the ideological substance and continuity of the League for which, nevertheless, until Morgan, there is no evidence; and (2) a political League with a varying number of leaders representing village and national interests and engaged in a full range of diplomatic efforts with colonial governments and other native groups. Writing in 1987, Daniel Richter drew a distinction between the Iroquois League, “a cultural and religious institution” that was “undeniably old, relatively unchanging,” and the Iroquois Confederacy, “a political and diplomatic entity” that “developed gradually in the years following contact.” Richter, “Ordeals,” 11–12. Following Richter, Fenton, *Great Law*, 4–5, concluded that by the eighteenth century, the League was “a convenient fiction,” while the Confederacy “had become the effective political institution.” I view the League/Confederacy as a unitary but evolving, adaptive system. For the sake of clarity and consistency I have chosen to use “League” throughout this essay, allowing that the term “Confederacy” could just as easily be substituted.

League was an initiating rather than a reactive movement, one where Iroquois sociocultural impulses were the prime mover and demonstrative of Indian self-interests.

The League or Confederacy was most commonly referred to by the English as the “Five Nations,” and *les cinq Nations Iroquoises* by the French. Its members’ self-designation, in their own languages, translates as some form of “the people of the longhouse,” the grand metaphor for the League and its drawing together of Iroquois people through their acceptance of the Great Peace. In Mohawk it is *kanuhsyú:ni*, ‘the extended house’.³⁸ The earliest documentation of the term is “Kanosoni” in a 1634–35 Dutch manuscript. In mid- to late-seventeenth-century French and English records appear “Hotinnonchiendi,” “Honontonchionni,” “Konossioni,” “Canossoené,” “Canossioone,” and “Caenostoery.” Then, as previously noted, there are Pyrlaeus’s “Aqanoschióni” (1743) and Morgan’s “Ho-dé-no-sau-nee” (1851). There are likely other attestations. Period glosses of these terms include “the completed Cabin” and “the whole howse, or all the Indians together.”³⁹ Pyrlaeus, it will be recalled, provided “those who make up a house, a family, the allies.” The spelling in common use among Iroquois today is Haudenosaunee.

The appearance in the historical record of terms for the League, whether in Iroquoian languages or as glossed by Europeans, offers no clues whatever regarding its organization, structure, or operation. Notwithstanding, what can be said with surety and is thoroughly documented is that the Iroquois were bound together in some form and measure of an alliance, and on numerous occasions, from about the second half of the seventeenth century through to the Revolution, numbers of their communities or villages appear to have acted in concert in the pursuit of common political and economic goals.⁴⁰ Evidence for such

³⁸Ives Goddard, “Synonymy,” in William N. Fenton “Northern Iroquoian Culture Patterns,” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 15, Northeast* (see note 32), 320; Charles T. Gehring and William A. Starna, trans. and eds., *A Journey into Mohawk and Oneida Country, 1634–1635: The Journal of Harmen Meyndertsz van den Bogaert* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1988), 46n111.

³⁹Gehring and Starna, *Journey*, 17, 46n111 (“Kanosoni”); Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610–1791*, 73 vols. (Cleveland, 1896–1901), 41:87 (“Hotinnonchiendi”); O’Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 4:78, 79, 120, 295, 563.

⁴⁰More than most scholars, apart from Fenton, “Authentication of the League,” 265, who thirty years ago wrote that the League “was a league of villages; it was a league of village chiefs,” Daniel Richter has characterized the reach of the League’s power in realistic terms, writing that his use of such phrases as “*the* Five Nations,” or “*the* Mohawks” should be read “as references to the activities of a particular leader or group of leaders, rather than to the product of a unitary, state-organized form of decision making.” Richter, *Ordeal*, 7. The historically experienced Iroquois political system was one of autonomous villages and shifting, ad hoc alliances operating in the midst of often intense factional conflict and narrow

activity is in the form of numerous examples and descriptions of Iroquois treaty-making—the earliest dating to 1645—whose value lies in the often detailed presentation of treaty processes and the associated ritual behavior. In this case, however, it is important to gauge the relevance of William Fenton's observation on treaty-making against the evolution of the Iroquois League: "Although certain ritual patterns [in treaty-making] appear in the records repeatedly, they were adapted to changes of situations, issues, and time. No single model accurately reflects the span of historical actuality."⁴¹

It is not until 1743, however, that an account surfaces of a council where the generally accepted critical components of the League are clearly described and identifiable; furthermore, it is from the same time in 1743 when Pyrlaeus almost certainly collected information on the League from the Indian Sganarády. That June, Conrad Weiser received orders from the government of Virginia to proceed to Onondaga. He was sent there to meet with and pacify the six Iroquois nations in the aftermath of a violent confrontation between certain "Virginia backwoodsmen" and a party of Iroquois on its way south.⁴² Weiser and his entourage reached Onondaga on 21 August; the council began nine days later, absent the Senecas. Weiser reported that, at the council's opening, "the Onondagoes rehearsed the beginning of the Union of the five Nations." Then he listened as a speaker "repeated all that was said

self-interests. An often overlooked indicator that this was the case is the plain fact that not one treaty was made between an entity representing itself as the League or Confederacy and the Dutch, French, or English colonial governments. The terms "Five Nations" and "Six Nations" represent, for all intents and purposes, a convenient cultural and administrative collectivity and by no means a consolidated political or military body. See Jennings, *Iroquois Empire*; Jack Campisi and William A. Starna, "On the Road to Canandaigua: The Treaty of 1794," *American Indian Quarterly* 19.4 (1995): 467–90; Thomas S. Ablner, "Seneca Moieties and Hereditary Chieftainships: The Early-Nineteenth-Century Political Organization of an Iroquois Nation," *Ethnohistory* 51.3 (2004): 464–65. Archaeology has lent an important voice to the issue of Iroquois communities and "territories," maintaining that the basic research unit is the village and associated horticultural lands and, in particular, that "the histories of the Iroquois nations can be understood best in terms of these nodes of settlement." Dean R. Snow, "Iroquoians and Europeans: Disunited Nations in the Early Contact Period," in *Proceedings of the 1992 People to People Conference*, ed. Charles F. Hayes III, Rochester Museum and Science Center Research Records 23, p. 2 (Rochester, N.Y., 1994). See also William Engelbrecht, *Iroquoia: The Development of a Native World* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2003); Bruce G. Trigger, "Prehistoric Social and Political Organization: An Iroquoian Case Study," in *Foundations of Northeast Archaeology*, ed. Dean R. Snow, 1–50 (New York, 1981).

⁴¹ Francis Jennings et al., eds., *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy: An Interdisciplinary Guide to the Treaties of the Six Nations and Their League* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1985), 127–53 (quotation on 127).

⁴² Jennings, *Iroquois Empire*, 379; Paul A. W. Wallace, *Conrad Weiser, 1696–1760: Friend of Colonist and Mohawk* (Philadelphia, 1945), 145–46. The Tuscaroras became the sixth Iroquois nation about the second decade of the eighteenth century.

in a Singing way, walking up and down in the House, added more in Praise of their wise ffathers [*sic*] and of the happy union, repeated all the Names of those Ancient Chiefs that establish'd it." Ceremonies continued through the afternoon. The next day a speaker reconvened the council with "*Brethren the United Nations*, you Togard Hogon our Brother, Nittaruntaquaa our Son, also Sonnawantowano and Tuscaroro, our Younger Sons, you, also, our absent Brother Ounghearrydawy dionen Horarrawe."⁴³

There is no evidence to suggest that Weiser or Pyrlaeus shared notes at any time on what they had observed or recorded about the League that summer. Weiser's information came from his attendance at the Onondaga council, where he was a principal participant.⁴⁴ In his *Lebenslauf*, Pyrlaeus writes that while he and his travel companion had wished to visit Onondaga, they were discouraged from doing so and, in fact, did not go.⁴⁵ Additionally, Pyrlaeus said that his source on the League was Sganarády, a detail for which there is no basis for doubt.

The relevant points of comparison to be drawn between Weiser's and Pyrlaeus's accounts are as follows: First, both men mentioned the founders of the League, names that Weiser heard recited at Onondaga and did not record, but that Pyrlaeus carefully spelled out, namely, Toganawíta (Mohawk), Otatschéchte (Oneida), Tatotárho (Onondaga), Togaháyon (Cayuga), and Ganniatario and Satagarúuyes (Senecas). Second, both provided a list of "council names" or "council titles," that is, the designations for the councils of League chiefs from each of the Iroquois nations. The kinship terms attached to the council names complete the metaphor of the "extended house" used by the Iroquois to order their League. Here Pyrlaeus furnished "Tgarihógu" (Mohawks), "the brother"; "Niharuntagóa" (Oneidas), "the older son"; "Sagochsanogéchte" (Onondagas); "Sonnawantówane" (Cayugas), "the young sons"; and "Tuscaróro" (Tuscaroras), "the younger son."⁴⁶ Weiser listed "Togard Hogon," "our Brother" (Mohawks); "Nittaruntaquaa," "our Son" (Oneidas); "Sonnawantowano" (Cayugas); "Tuscaroro," "our

⁴³Weiser's report cited in Jennings, *Iroquois Empire*, 382. See also Wallace, *Conrad Weiser*, 163.

⁴⁴In a [1746–49] letter to Christopher Saur, Weiser offered a one-sentence description of Iroquois government: "Each nation of the six tribes sends Deputies to the great Council at Onontogo once or twice a year to confer with each other." Abraham H. Cassell, comp., Helen Bell, trans., "Notes on the Iroquois and Delaware Indians," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 1.3 (1877): 321.

⁴⁵Pyrlaeus, *Lebenslauf*, 57. There is nothing in the record to suggest that Pyrlaeus was aware that a council at Onondaga had been scheduled or, indeed, had concluded some two weeks earlier.

⁴⁶Pyrlaeus attributed to the Senecas what is known from all other sources to be the Cayuga council name.

Younger Sons” (Tuscaroras); and the absent “Brother” “Ounghearry-daw y dionen Horarrawe” (Senecas).⁴⁷

Nothing further on these key elements of the League surfaces in the documentary record until 1801.⁴⁸ Then, in answer to questionnaires put before Joseph Brant, the renowned Mohawk leader, and John Norton at Six Nations (Ontario) that January, the following was elicited.⁴⁹ First, from Brant, are the names of the founders of the League: “Tekanawidagh” from the Mohawks, fathers to the Oneidas; “Otatsighte” from the Oneidas, sons to the Mohawks; “Thadodarhoagh” (also “Thadodarhonagh”) from the Onondagas, brothers to the Mohawks; “Shonónawendówane” from the Cayugas, sons to the Mohawks, brothers to the Oneidas; and “Kanyadariyoh” and “Shadekaroínysis” from the Senecas. In this listing, however, Brant supplied the council title for the Cayugas in place of the founding chief’s name. In addition, he furnished an outline of the myth mentioning two of its central characters, “Tekanawítagh” and “Adergaghtha,” whom he identified as Mohawks, and placed the point of geographical origin for the formation of the League “[a]t the lower end of the German flats above the Little Falls on Mohawk River” some seventy-five miles west of Albany. He also stated

⁴⁷ “[D]ionen Horarrawe” is a form of the last listed chief on the eight-person Seneca roster: Deyohninhohakarawenh [*teyoninhokarâ-wę* ‘the door is open’ (M); *to-nihokæ-węh* (S)]. See Tooker, “League,” 425. In a margin comment Pyrlaeus writes that “Onuchgarritáwy,” Weiser’s “Oungcarrydawy,” is the name of one of the Seneca villages in 1743. Weiser does not record the council name for the Onondagas. In an account attributed to Weiser and published in *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle* (1744): 665–66, these names are rendered “Docaryhoogou” (Mohawks); “Niharontaquos” (Oneidas); “Sagochsaangechter” (Onondagas); “Ganunawantowano” (Cayugas); and “Onughkaarydaawy” and “Dyionenhookaraw” (Senecas). In his report of a 1750 council at Onondaga Weiser listed “digarihogon” (Mohawks); “Nittaronhaquoa” (Oneidas); “Sasgosdanagechteront” (Onondagas); “Sanunowartowan” (Cayugas); “dyiontsin Hogararow” (Senecas); and “Tuscarroro” (Tuscaroras). Helga Doblin and William A. Starna, trans. and eds., *The Journals of Christian Daniel Claus and Conrad Weiser: A Journey to Onondaga, 1750*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 84.2 (Philadelphia, 1994), 18. Similarly, at Onondaga in 1753 he supplies: “Togarihoan” (Mohawks); “Neharontoquoah” (Oneidas); “Sagosanagechteront” (Onondagas); “Sanonowantowano” (Cayugas); “Dyionenhogaron” (Senecas); and “Tuscaroro” (Tuscaroras). Wallace, *Conrad Weiser*, 315. “Sasgosdanagechteron” and “Sagosanagechteront” are Weiser’s renderings in Mohawk of *shagohsênagebde*’ (On) ‘he is their title bearer’, ‘name bearers’. Hanni Woodbury, personal communication, 2006. N.B. Here and elsewhere the glottal stop is represented by the symbol ‘.

⁴⁸ It should be said that recognizable forms of the condolence ritual—its ceremony and metaphors—which all agree has considerable time depth, are found in the documentary record chiefly from treaty councils and other face-to-face meetings between Iroquois people and colonial authorities held throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Jennings et al., *Iroquois Diplomacy*.

⁴⁹ Although the questionnaires do not survive, it is nonetheless possible to infer what questions had been asked. Douglas W. Boyce, “A Glimpse of Iroquois Culture History through the Eyes of Joseph Brant and John Norton,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 117.4 (1973): 286–94.

that “[t]he first Mohawk that saw the Dutch was Atyósongh,” a curious piece of information not found elsewhere.⁵⁰ And preceding Morgan by a half century, Brant remarked on the numbers and distribution of League chiefs, information that he may have gathered from Six Nations: “The Onidas [*sic*] and Mohawks had the same number of chiefs, nine each, and the others had a much greater number; but all in [the] same manner particular families in the nation had the right of choosing a chief from among themselves.”⁵¹

Of John Norton’s several responses to the questionnaire, one is of relevance to the formation of the League: “The names of the different chiefs who formed it [the League] are worded as follows Tekanawidagh of the Mohawks Otatshighte of the Onidas stiled his son; Thatodarhóagh of the Onondagas; Agaenyony of the Cayugus, Kanyadariyon and Shatekaróny of the Senecas—the Mohawks, Onondagas and Scncas [*sic*] called each other brothers, the Onidas & Cayugus they called their children and consequently these called each other brothers.”⁵² In his published journal, however, Norton provides an extensive and detailed account of the Deganawidah epic, the first of its kind.

In Norton’s version the central figure is “Hayouwaghtengh” (Ayonhwathah), who wanders from one village to the next seeking to form the League. His efforts begin in earnest following his arrival in a Mohawk village at the mouth of Schoharie Creek, thirty-five miles west of Albany, and with his introduction to the chief there, “Tekannawitagh” (Deganawidah). The two travel west, meeting along the way an Oneida, who, greeting them as “my father,” is addressed as “my son” and named “Odatsheghte.” Continuing on they encounter the Onondaga “Thatotarho” and give the Onondagas the council title “Roghseanakighte.”⁵³ Norton does not name the chiefs of the Cayugas or Senecas; however, along with the Oneidas, they receive council titles: “Harontakowa” (Oneidas); “Shonnounaweantowa” (Cayugas); and “Ronninhohhonte” (Senecas).⁵⁴

Heckewelder’s 1819 description of the League, derived in great part from Pyrlaeus, is followed in time by two brief mentions. The first, dated about 1821–25, is that of the Seneca physician Jacob Jameson, who in reply to a questionnaire reported, “The Senecas are connected

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 288–89, 291–92.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 290. Morgan’s distribution of chiefs, repeated by those who have followed, was nine Mohawks, nine Oneidas, fourteen Onondagas, ten Cayugas, and eight Senecas. *League*, 64–65; Fenton, *Great Law*, 193–94.

⁵² Boyce, “A Glimpse,” 293.

⁵³ A Mohawk language form; *shagohsènagehde*’ in Onondaga. Hanni Woodbury, personal communication, 2006.

⁵⁴ Carl F. Klinck and James J. Talman, eds., *The Journal of Major John Norton, 1816* (Toronto, 1970), 98–106.

with the Onodagas [*sic*], Cayugas, Mohawks, Oneidas & Tuscaroras; and they consider themselves as the first in rank among these nations. They call the Onodagas & Mohawks Brothers, and the Cayugas, Oneidas & Tuscaroras Children. . . . The great council fire of the Six Nations was formerly built at Onodaga; at present it is at Buffalo.”⁵⁵ Of note in Jameson’s statement is the emphasis he placed on the Senecas, a perspective most likely linked to his nationality.

The second mention is from a booklet written by David Cusick, a Tuscarora, first published in 1825. Fenton observed that the value of Cusick’s account “is not in his chronicle but in the establishment from undoubtedly eighteenth-century sources of an important element in the plot”—the role of Adodarhoh (Thadodaho) in the formation of the League.⁵⁶ Yet there are several aspects of Cusick’s story that bear scrutiny. First, Cusick tells us, a supernatural named “Tarenyawagon i.e. the Holder of the Heavens,” leads a party of natives to the banks of the Hudson River.⁵⁷ “Of this company,” he continues, “there was a particular body which called themselves one household; of these were six families and they entered into a resolution to preserve the chain of alliance which should not be extinguished in any manner.” The first family is directed to take up residence on the Mohawk River, receiving the name “Te-hawre-ho-geh,” the Mohawks; the second becomes the Oneidas, “Ne-haw-retah-go”; the third “Seuh-now-kah-tah,” the Onodagas; the fourth, “Sho-nea-na-we-to-wah,” the Cayugas; and the fifth, “Te-how-nea-nyo-hent,” the Senecas.⁵⁸ The sixth family continues west, taking a circuitous route to Lake Erie, thence to the Mississippi, and finally to the southeast and North Carolina, becoming the Tuscaroras, who at a later date would rejoin their Iroquoian brethren.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ William N. Fenton, ed., “Answers to Governor Cass’s Questions by Jacob Jameson, a Seneca [ca. 1821–1825],” *Ethnohistory* 16.2 (1969): 132.

⁵⁶ Fenton, *Great Law*, 64.

⁵⁷ Tharonhiawagon is the Good Twin or Sapling, the culture hero of the cosmological myth of the Iroquois. His name is translated ‘He Who Grasps the Sky’ and also ‘Holder of the Heavens’. See William N. Fenton, “Northern Iroquoian Culture Patterns,” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 15, Northeast* (see note 32), 319; idem, *Great Law*, chap. 2. Contrary to suggestions offered in some of the late nineteenth-century League literature, Tharonhiawagon is unrelated to Pyrlaeus’s “Thannawáge” or the various forms of Ayonhwathah. See Hale, *Book of Rites*, 35; William M. Beauchamp, “Hi-a-wat-ha,” *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 4 (1891): 298; J.N.B. Hewitt, “A Constitutional League of Peace in the Stone Age of America: The League of the Iroquois and Its Constitution,” *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1918* (1920): 539–40.

⁵⁸ Up to this point the story mirrors something of Pyrlaeus’s account, especially in comparing his six founding chiefs with Cusick’s six families.

⁵⁹ David Cusick, *David Cusick’s Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations* (Tuscarora Village, Lewiston, N.Y., 1828), 16–18. It is not known whether Cusick had read of Pyrlaeus’s account in Heckewelder’s *History*, however, the possibility must be given due consideration.

Lewis Henry Morgan (1851) spent little time with native tradition surrounding the founding of the League, remarking simply that in their account “the Iroquois invariably go back to a remote and uncertain period.” He was wary of what he had been told about the League’s not having evolved gradually but instead arising full-blown from “one protracted effort of legislation.”⁶⁰ Nonetheless, his explanation that the League was an elaboration on the Iroquois family, on kinship ties, and furthermore that these ties “were carried throughout their civil and social system, from individuals to tribe, from tribes to nations, and from the nations to the League itself,” appears to have accurately reflected native theory of the mid-nineteenth century. Morgan did provide a roster of fifty chiefs’ titles in which are found the names of the founders: “Da-gä-no-wé-dä” (Mohawk); “Ho-däs’-hä-the” (Oneida); “To-do-dä’-ho” (Onondaga); “Da-gä’-ä-yo” (Cayuga); and “Gä-ne-o-di’-yo” and “Sä-dä-gä’-o-yase” (Senecas). Excepting the Mohawk title, these names are ranked first in the lists for the other four nations.⁶¹

After Morgan came the works of several scholars whose primary concerns were with the form and function of the League; their sources were chiefly the voices and pens of Iroquois culture bearers and intellectuals. Foremost among these was Horatio Hale, who in 1883 published his *Iroquois Book of Rites*.⁶² In his book Hale named “the six great chiefs who, as representatives of their several nations, formed the confederacy”: “Dekanawidah” (Mohawk); “Otatsehte (or Odadsheghte)” (Oneida) [the “political son” of Dekanawidah]; “Wathadodarho (Aotarho)” (Onondaga) [Otatsehte’s uncle and Dekanawidah’s brother]; “Akahenyonh” (Cayuga) [Wathadodarho’s son]; “Kanadariyu” [Akahenyonh’s uncle] and “Shadekaronyes” [Kanadariyu’s cousin] (Senecas). Hale also listed the League’s council names: “Tehadirihoken” (Mohawk); “Nihatirontakowa” (Oneida); “Sakosennakehte” (Onondaga); “Sotinsonawentona” (Cayuga); and “Sonnontowanas” (Seneca).⁶³

From Morgan to the present day the fifty chiefs’ titles have remained fundamentally consistent with one important exception. To illustrate, the essential and authoritative 1912 Gibson-Goldenweiser version of the League tradition provides the following first ranked titles of chiefs: Degaihógh (Mohawk); Ho’dátshehde’ (Oneida); Thadodá’ho’ (Onondaga);

⁶⁰This sentiment was echoed by a missionary to the Senecas in the nineteenth century. See William N. Fenton, ed., “Seneca Indians by Asher Wright (1859),” *Ethnohistory* 4.3 (1957): 309–10.

⁶¹Morgan, *League*, 60–61, 64–65.

⁶²Hale, *Book of Rites*. I have not included a confused and wholly ignored account of the League’s formation published a year earlier by Albert S. Gatschet, “Linguistic Notes,” *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal* 4 (1881–82): 74–75.

⁶³Hale, *Book of Rites*, 76, 78–79.

Haga'ę-yuḱ (Cayuga); and Sganyadáiyō' and Tsha'degáęhyes (Senecas).⁶⁴ In addition, the roll call of chiefs collected at the Six Nations Reserve, Ohsweken, Ontario, in the 1950s included Dega'ihó'gē (Mohawk); Hoda'tshehde' (Oneida); Thadoda'ho' (Onondaga); Haga'a'ęyōnk (Cayuga); and Skanyada'iyō and Sha'dega'ōhyes (Senecas).⁶⁵ In this and other lists compiled after Morgan, Deganawidah, one of the six founders of the League as reported by Pyrlaeus, Brant, and Norton, and listed as the third ranked Mohawk chief by Morgan, is not found, apparently replaced by Dekarihokenh.⁶⁶ Dekarihokenh, it will be recalled, is recognizable as the council name or title for the Mohawks.

A partial explanation for this occurrence, drawn from information found in the League epic itself, is that the title of Deganawidah, arguably the most influential of the founders, was not to be perpetuated; thus, the name should not appear on any of the succeeding lists of fifty chiefs.⁶⁷ Obviously, however, this has historically not been the case. Deganawidah, mentioned first by Pyrlaeus in 1743, and then by Brant and Norton, is on Morgan's 1851 roster.⁶⁸ It was only after Morgan that this title was supplanted by Dekarihokenh, a substitution that dates from Hale's *Book of Rites* (1883) and the roll call of chiefs he reproduced there from John Buck's manuscript.⁶⁹ This adjustment suggests that important aspects of the League epic have changed over time, undoubtedly in response to factors internal and perhaps external to Iro-

⁶⁴Gibson-Goldenweiser. After Onondaga chief John A. Gibson, who dictated the only complete version of the League tradition published in an Iroquois language to Columbia University anthropologist Alexander A. Goldenweiser. See Woodbury, *Concerning the League*, xi and passim.

⁶⁵Annemarie Anrod Shimony, *Conservatism among the Iroquois at the Six Nations Reserve* (New Haven, Conn., 1961; repr. with an introduction by Annemarie Shimony, Syracuse, N.Y., 1994), 104–16.

⁶⁶For a treatment of several of the remaining lists see William N. Fenton, "The Roll Call of Iroquois Chiefs: A Study of a Mnemonic Cane from the Six Nations Reserve," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections* 111.15 (1950): 59–67. See also E. M. Chadwick, *The People of the Longhouse* (Toronto, 1897), 86–96; David Boyle, "The Pagan Iroquois," *Annual Archaeological Report for 1898, Being Part of the Appendix to the Report of the Minister of Education, Ontario*, 177–78 (Toronto, 1898); Woodbury, *Concerning the League*.

⁶⁷See Hale, *Book of Rites*, 31. Shimony, *Conservatism*, 104, reports that the title of Ayonhwathah was also not to be perpetuated; even so, it appears on every known list of chiefs. See also Tooker, "League," 424.

⁶⁸Hale, *Book of Rites*, 31n1, explains that it was an "erroneous suggestion, from another source" that had led Morgan to mistakenly replace the name of the third-ranked Mohawk chief, "Shatekariwate (in Seneca Sadekeiwadeh)" with Deganawidah (Morgan's "Da-gá-nó-wé-dá") in the roster he published in *League of the Iroquois*. Whether the phrase "erroneous suggestion" came from Morgan or was Hale's reading of what he contends had been discussed between them is unknown.

⁶⁹Hale, *Book of Rites*, 129. John Buck carried the Onondaga League chief's name Skanaawadi.

quois communities. This might extend as well to the deference accorded Deganawidah's name. First documented in 1912 is the edict, allegedly issued by Deganawidah himself, that "the only time that it shall be proper that my name shall be mentioned is when the Condolence Ceremonies are being performed or when the good tidings of Peace and Power which I have established and organized are being discussed or rehearsed." In a continuing observance of this edict, Iroquois people today use the English noun "Peacemaker" in place of Deganawidah in public discourse.⁷⁰

Summarizing the documentary record of the League for the period 1743–1883, described above, yields the following: (1) there were six founding chiefs representing the five Iroquois nations whose names are consistent through time; (2) the council names or titles attached to each nation also remain the same through time; (3) in the earliest account by Pyrlaeus, followed by Brant, Norton, and then Cusick and Hale, the process of forming the League is said to have begun in the Mohawk Valley or in what is generally considered to be Mohawk country; and (4) although Brant specified that there were nine Mohawk and nine Oneida chiefs, there is no complete enumeration of League chiefs until Morgan in 1851.

In assessing the documentary evidence on the League's origins, it is important to note that the earliest accounts, those of Pyrlaeus (1743) and Brant (1801), are original and independent of each other. Moreover, the council names reported by Pyrlaeus were separately corroborated by Weiser during his meeting with the Onondagas that same year. Norton, on the other hand, was an intimate of Brant while both were together at Grand River from the late 1790s until Brant's death in 1807. He was regarded as Brant's adopted "nephew," served as his interpreter, emissary, and deputy, and was tapped to be his successor. Norton's information on the League's origins must be considered in this light, although he did spend another decade or so at Grand River, deeply involved in the community and its affairs.⁷¹ It is conceivable that Cusick (1825) had access to Heckewelder's treatise; Hale (1883) cites it. Finally, there is nothing in this record that would raise questions about the existence of the Iroquois League; nonetheless, its precise structure and how it may have functioned remained unknown until

⁷⁰Duncan C. Scott, "Traditional History of the Confederacy of the Six Nations," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 3rd ser., 5.2 (1912): 230. Abler, "Seneca Moieties," 482n4, observes that there was no prohibition against using the name Deganawidah until the very recent past, that is, the last two to three decades or so.

⁷¹See Klinck and Talman, *Journal*.

Morgan. Knowledgeable persons such as New York's colonial governor Cadwallader Colden, writing in 1727, could report only that "[t]he Five Nations (as their Name denotes) consist of so many Tribes or Nations joyn'd together by a League or Confederacy, like the United Provinces, without any Superiority of any one over the other. This Union has continued so long that the Christians know nothing of the Original of it."⁷² And in spite of having spent more than three decades residing among the Iroquois and serving most notably as New York's Indian agent and later superintendent for the northern Indian department, Sir William Johnson had little to offer about the League. Indian people—presumably Iroquois—in proximity to colonial settlements, he wrote in 1771, who relied "solely on oral Tradition for the support of the Ancient usages, have lost [a] great part of them, & have blended some with Customs amongst ourselves, so as to render it Extremely difficult, if not impossible to Trace their Customs to their origin or to discover their Explication." Those who "are a degree farther removed . . . have altered their system of Politicks, tho' they still retain many Ancient Customs, they are much at a Loss to account for them." Finally, Johnson remarked, the Iroquois situated farthest west, who a century earlier had been visited by French Jesuits, "cannot give a satisfactory acc^t of their original signification, and have so blended the whole with fable, as to render it [a] matter of great difficulty to Separate the Truth from it." Insofar as the League per se was concerned, Johnson concluded, "the Mohawks . . . are still the acknowledged Head of that Alliance."⁷³

BEGINNINGS

Although it may be impossible to determine a precise date of origin for the Iroquois League, there do exist several lines of evidence that point to its approximate beginnings, the motivations leading to its formation, and the context in which its creation took place. Evidence bearing on the history of the Mohawks as linked to the Deganawidah epic and also concerning their encounter with Europeans is key to understanding the creation and evolution of the alliance that came to exist between the five Iroquois nations. It was the Mohawks, after all, who were the first among the Iroquois to experience sustained contact with Dutch interlopers and, by all accounts, were pivotal in the establishment of the fur

⁷² Cadwallader Colden, *The History of the Five Indian Nations Depending on the Province of New-York in America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1958), xvii.

⁷³ E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *The Documentary History of the State of New York, Arranged Under Direction of the Hon. Christopher Morgan, Secretary of State*, quarto edition, 4 vols. (Albany, N.Y., 1850–51), 4:270.

trade; moreover, in the Deganawidah epic, the oral history as told by Iroquois people themselves, the Mohawks occupy a place of singular importance.⁷⁴

Dutch ships began appearing on the Hudson River soon after Henry Hudson's explorations in 1609. Although the record is sparse, the first vessel known to be dispatched to engage in the fur trade in what would be called New Netherland was the *St. Pieter* out of Amsterdam in 1611, commissioned by a group of investors, the Van Tweenhuysen Company. Others quickly followed. In 1613–14 the company sent out the *Fortuyn*, whose captain, Hendrick Christiaensz, and crew would build a small fortified trading house on an island in the Hudson River behind which flowed the Normanskill, a large tributary that today marks the southern limit of the city of Albany. The trading house was named Fort Nassau; the island became best known as Castle Island.⁷⁵

The first documented reference to an early Dutch presence on the upper Hudson, one that came *directly* from the voices of the Iroquois, dates to 1678: "The Sachims of the Onnondages say that they then came to confirm the Ancient Brotherhood which they would remind their Bretheren [in Albany] has subsisted from the first Instance of Navigation being in use here (at the time of a Gov^r called Jacques) & hath continued to the time of Old Corlaer & from Old Corlaer to his Present Excell^y, for the Continuance of which they might rejoice & now Renew the ancient Covenant & make the Chain Bright."⁷⁶ In 1689 "Jacques" is again mentioned, and again by Iroquois emissaries assembled in Albany:

The Sinnekes, Cayouges, onnondages, Oneydes Speak to the Magistrates of Albany and Say They are come to Renew the old Covenant

⁷⁴Hale, *Book of Rites*, 179, is the only writer to link the "white people" and "Europeans" of Pyrlaus's account to the French and Cartier rather than to the Dutch. He was mistaken.

⁷⁵Simon Hart, *The Prehistory of the New Netherland Company: Amsterdam Notarial Records of the first Dutch Voyages to the Hudson* (Amsterdam, 1959), 18–22, 27, 54. See also Jaap Jacobs, *New Netherland: A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth-Century America* (Leiden, 2005), 30–37; J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Narratives of New Netherland 1609–1664* (New York, 1909), 47–48. For a contrarian view on the building of Fort Nassau, see Van Cleef Bachman, *Peltries or Plantations: The Economic Policies of the Dutch West India Company in New Netherland, 1623–1639* (Baltimore, Md., 1969), 11–12. Castle Island has been known at various times as Martin Gerritsz's Island, Patroon's Island, and Westerlo Island.

⁷⁶This and the document that follows mentioning "Jacques" were first brought to the attention of scholars by Daniel K. Richter, "Rediscovered Links in the Covenant Chain: Previously Unpublished Transcripts of New York Indian Treaty Minutes, 1677–1691," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 92 (1982): 48, 76. "Old Corlaer" is Arent van Curler, the commissary of the patroonship of Rensselaerswijck and founder of Schenectady, who had forged very close ties with the Mohawks. "His Present Excell^y" is Sir Edmund Andros, governor of New York.

made with Jacques many years ago who came with a Ship into their Waters & rec^d them as Bretheren, & then the maquase, oneydes, & onnondages desired him to Establish himself in this Country & the Sinnekes & Cayouges they drew into that General Covenant, and that they had with one accord Planted the Tree of good Understanding & had allways been dutifull to this Government. . . . They say that the Maquase, oneydes & onnondages did carry the Ankor of the Ship that Jacques came in, to onnondage that beeing the meeting place of the five Nations & this they now renew & Confirm.⁷⁷

“Jacques” is named a final time by the Iroquois two years later in a meeting with New York’s Governor Sloughter: “We have been informed by our Forefathers that in former times a Ship arrived here in this Country which was a matter of great admiration to us, especially our desire was to know what was within her Belly. In that Ship were Christians, amongst the rest one Jaques with whom we made a Covenant of friendship, which covenant hath since been tied together with a chaine and always ever since kept inviolable.”⁷⁸

Historian Daniel Richter has sorted out the identity of “Jacques” as one Jacob Jacobsz Eelckens, born in Amsterdam in 1593 and raised in Rouen.⁷⁹ Eelckens was supercargo on the 1613–14 voyage of the *Fortuyn* to the upper Hudson River and was instrumental in establishing the Indian trade there. Both he and ship’s captain Christiaensz returned to Amsterdam on the *Fortuyn* in July 1614. In 1615–16 Eelckens was back at Fort Nassau, now as its commander. Sometime thereafter he sailed again to the Netherlands, returning late in 1618 as skipper of the *Schildpad* in the employ of his uncle Hendrick Eelckens’s company. In the interim, spring floods had forced Dutch traders to permanently abandon Fort Nassau and do their bargaining from ships or temporary quarters on shore.⁸⁰ Eelckens married in Amsterdam in mid-summer 1619. Near the end of the year he sailed from Texel as supercargo on the *Witte Duyf*, with Hans Jorisz Hontom at the helm, reaching the

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 48–49, 81.

⁷⁸ O’Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 3:775. See also Colden, *History*, 87–88; Charles Howard McIlwain, ed. and introd., *An Abridgment of the Indian Affairs Contained in Four Folio Volumes, Transacted in the Colony of New York, from the Year 1678 to the Year 1751*, by Peter Wraxall (1915; reissued, New York, 1968), 16.

⁷⁹ Richter, “Rediscovered Links,” 49–55. See also Richter, *Ordeal*, 87–89. My own subsequent analysis of the documentary record, in addition to discussions with Charles Gehring, director of the New York State Library’s New Netherland Project, leaves no doubt as to the accuracy of Richter’s identification. Eelckens’s name also appears in the primary sources as Eelkens, Elckens, Eelkes, Elkins, Elkens, and Elekes.

⁸⁰ Chronicler Nicolaes van Wassenaer’s view, ca. 1624, was that the Indians nearest Fort Nassau were “somewhat discontented, and not easy to live with,” leaving the traders with little choice but to move their operations elsewhere. Jameson, *Narratives*, 67.

Hudson in March 1620; the *Witte Duyf*, again with Eelckens on board, made a second voyage to New Netherland in 1621. By now the trade in furs had generated a good deal of fierce and often violent competition between Dutch companies and their agents operating up and down the valley, attended by at least one deadly encounter with native people.⁸¹

As Richter points out, few specifics of Eelckens's activities can be satisfactorily documented. What can safely be assumed, however, is that Eelckens early on forged and then maintained a serviceable level of amicable and, of course, profitable trade relations with the Indians in the region who packed their furs to Fort Nassau. That he was successful in these endeavors may be inferred from his being favored with command of the fort, the main base of operations for the New Netherland Company, for at least a year of its existence. Further confirmation of Eelckens's abilities comes from a 1633 dust-up he had with Dutch authorities while serving as supercargo on the English ship *William*.

The *William* and its crew had been sent to the Hudson to challenge Dutch claims to New Netherland and their control of the fur trade, reaching the river in late April. With his considerable experience in the region and familiarity with its native residents, bolstered by his own motives obviously divorced from any loyalties to *patria*, Eelckens was key to the mission. After a stopover of several days in New Amsterdam, where there was a to and fro with the newly arrived director, Wouter van Twiller, over trading rights, the *William* sailed upriver to just below Fort Orange, presently trailed by a Dutch-manned caravel and a smaller smack.⁸² For about two weeks Eelckens carried out a lively trade with the Indians from a tent he and his crew had pitched on shore—until “there came about a dozen dutch men, with half pikes, swords, musketts and pistolls” led by the commander of Fort Orange, Hans Jorisz Hontom. In the ensuing tumult Eelckens's tent was pulled down, a portion of his merchandise was confiscated, and, for good measure, the soldiers beat some of the natives who had come to trade. As soon as the situation quieted the *William*, with Eelckens on board, was accompanied downriver to New Amsterdam and, after further questioning of its crew by Dutch officials, sent out to sea.

In a deposition given in regard to the incident, Eelckens was described as “being well acquainted with the said Indians, having often

⁸¹ The best discussion on the first decades of the fur trade is Jacobs, *New Netherland*, 31–44. On Eelckens, see Hart, *Prehistory*, 54–55; Jameson, *Narratives*, 47. The date of Eelckens's employment with the Van Tweenhuysen Company is “before the year 1614.” O'Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 94.

⁸² Eelckens may have gone ashore near the former site of Fort Nassau. One deponent testified that there had been three vessels: a pinnace, a caravel, and a hoy. O'Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 1:75.

traded with them and speakinge their language.” A second deponent added that Eelckens “was much beloved of them; and that they were a greate deale more willinge to trade with him then [*sic*] with the Dutch.” Trade indeed. One deponent allowed that if the *William* had been permitted to stay longer on the upper Hudson, “a nation, called the Maques [Mohawks], would come downe, and bringe with them fower thousand beaver skinnes. And another nation, called the Mahiggins [Mahicans], would come downe thither with three hundred skinnes more.”⁸³

From the previous decade, however, there are documented one or two unsavory exceptions to what one might presume to have been Eelckens’s largely unimpeached reputation with the Indians. Sometime in 1622, Eelckens is reported to have extorted zewant—wampum—from an Indian on the Connecticut River, where the Dutch were trading. He had seized a headman from one of the local groups, demanding from the man a large ransom in zewant or he would cut off his head. The headman apparently complied. Possibly that same year Eelckens was indirectly involved in a second extortion attempt, this time involving a Mohawk headman. In a sworn interrogatory it was disclosed that captain Hans Jorisz Hontom had taken the headman prisoner and then, with the ransom in hand, “cut out the male organs of the aforesaid chief.” It is not known what part Eelckens may have played in this killing, but at the time he was serving as supercargo on Hontom’s ship.⁸⁴

Upon the completion of his deposition in November 1633, Eelckens disappears from the historical record.⁸⁵ But in the two decades dur-

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 74, 76, 78. Information on this episode is *ibid.*, 71–81, 91–95; Jameson, *Narratives*, 186–89. See also Albert Eekhof, *Bastiaen Jansz. Krol, krankenbezoeker, kommissie en kommandeur van Nieuw-Nederland (1595–1645). Nieuwe gegevens voor de kennis der estigting van ons kerkelijk en koloniaal gezag in Noord-Amerika* (The Hague, 1910), xxv–xxxii. I thank Charles Gehring for translating for me Krol’s 30 June 1634 interrogatory in Eekhof. The depositions cited from *Documents Relative* were taken as part of a claim for damages brought by Eelckens against the Dutch West India Company for the losses he allegedly suffered. The large number of furs that he apparently arranged to be delivered by the Mohawks and Mahicans, however, would have been unrelated to any settlement; thus, these figures should be taken at their face value.

⁸⁴ For the best treatment of these incidents, see Charles T. Gehring, “The Dutch among the People of the Long River” (paper presented at the 2nd Mashantucket Pequot History Conference, Ledyard, Conn., 1993): <http://www.nnp.org/nni/Annals/2001.pdf>. In his essay, Gehring lends support to an earlier suggestion that the Indian taken on the Connecticut River was the Pequot headman Tatobem. See Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500–1643* (New York, 1982), 148. Gehring adds, however, that it may have been Tatobem who a decade later was again captured, but then murdered, possibly at the hands of Eelckens. The translated interrogatory on Hontom is in Charles T. Gehring and William A. Starna, “Dutch and Indians in the Hudson Valley: The Early Period,” *The Hudson Valley Regional Review* 9.2 (1992): 15–16.

⁸⁵ O’Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 1:79–81. Eelckens’s name appears in the preliminary finding on his claim dated 25 October 1634. *Ibid.*, 93–95.

ing which we have evidence of his activities, in particular the years when Fort Nassau was up and running, there can be no doubt of his standing as a central figure in the development of the early trade, and to Indian people, who provided the furs he sought and interacted with him. Richter, I believe, has placed Eelckens in the appropriate cultural context and as he may have been viewed by native people: “Eelckens would have appeared to be the local Dutch headman: he was the principal figure who dealt with them, he was the apparent spokesman for his people, and he gave rich presents in European goods.”⁸⁶ It is little wonder, then, that Eelckens was remembered by Iroquois leaders more than a half century later as “a Gov^r called Jacques,” who many years previous had come “with a Ship into their Waters & rec^d them as Brethren, & then the maquase, oneydes, & onnondages desired him to Establish himself in this Country & the Sinnekes & Cayouges they drew into that General Covenant.”⁸⁷

The covenant with Eelckens that the Iroquois recalled, I maintain, is linked directly to the trade he had first organized and then conducted from Fort Nassau on the upper Hudson. His clients were local Mahicans and Munsees, but significantly, also Mohawks. Moreover, this covenant, which most likely dates around the years 1614 to 1617, may very well signal the inception of the Iroquois League. Several independent lines of evidence tell the tale.

In that earliest documented account of the League’s origins recorded by Pyrlaeus in 1743, several points of reference are noted.⁸⁸ First, that the alliance between the five Iroquois nations “was formed one man’s life ago, before the white people built Albany, or rather, were first seen ~~there~~ in that area.”⁸⁹ Fort Orange, around which grew the village of Beverwijck, later Albany, was built in 1624, marking the earliest

⁸⁶Richter, *Ordeal*, 88–89. George Hamell, “Trading in Metaphors: The Magic of Beads,” in *Proceedings of the 1982 Glass Trade Bead Conference*, ed. Charles F. Hayes III, Rochester Museum and Science Center Research Records 16, p. 26 (Rochester, N.Y., 1983), suggests that recently arrived Europeans may have been perceived as the “‘returned’ culture hero(es).”

⁸⁷Richter, “Rediscovered Links,” 76, 81.

⁸⁸Readers are asked to refer to the translation of Pyrlaeus’s account presented earlier in this essay from which the quoted passages that follow are taken.

⁸⁹Heckewelder, *History*, 56n1, rendered this passage from Pyrlaeus thus: “one age (or the length of a man’s life) before the white people (the Dutch) came into the country.” Pyrlaeus however, had actually written “one man’s life ago, before the white people built Albany, or rather, were first seen ~~there~~ in that area.” “One man’s life ago” may simply be a time referent for Sganarady’s telling of the story; that is, “one man’s life” before 1743 and Pyrlaeus’s recording of what Sganarady had told him. It would be similar to saying, “Many years ago, before the white people built Albany.” What matters is that “one man’s life ago” is unrelated to a determination of when the alliance was formed. The operative word is the temporally indefinite “before.”

permanent presence of the Dutch in the upper Hudson Valley.⁹⁰ Then comes what from all appearances is a second alliance, this between the Iroquois and the Dutch. Here, the grandfather of Sganarády, the “credible old Indian” who had related to Pyrlaeus the story of the League, was one of the delegates “sent to form an alliance of peace with the whites (Europeans).” Assuming a generation interval of thirty years, this Iroquois-Dutch alliance would have taken place about 1650. If, on the other hand, Sganarády was truly an old man, perhaps seventy years of age in 1743, and his father was twenty at Sganarády’s birth, and his father before him was also twenty, then the date of the alliance might be pushed back to about 1630. In the end, however, such calculations are probably meaningless, other than to underscore the point that the Iroquois-Dutch alliance had obviously been an early post-contact event.⁹¹

The Iroquois-Dutch alliance is said to have taken place near the Normanskill—which flows into the Hudson below the former site of Fort Orange—“to which place the *Mohawks* first came for the formation of the alliance.” Immediately following this comes, “The names of the 5 special chiefs who were the deputies of the nations that had formed the peace alliance,” namely, Toganawíta, Otatschéchte, Tatotárho, Togaháyon, Ganniatarío, and Satagarúuyes. And herein lies an ambiguity in the tale, or, perhaps, some confusion on the part of either Pyrlaeus or Sganarády, or of both men.

A full and fair reading of Pyrlaeus’s account suggests that there had been two separate alliances: the first between the five Iroquois nations, the collectivity referred to as the “Aquanoschióni,” and a second, a peace agreement between the Iroquois and the Dutch that seems to have taken place sometime thereafter. A second reading, however—one that considers the additional details that Pyrlaeus offers—suggests some overlap if not a coalescence of the narrative surrounding these alliances; that they are, in fact, one and the same.

⁹⁰See Janny Venema, *Beverwijck: A Dutch Village on the American Frontier, 1652–1664* (Hilversum, 2003); Jacobs, *New Netherland*. The phrase “were first seen there in that area” could also be a nod to the Dutch presence at Fort Nassau, built a decade earlier. This, however, does not materially alter the timing of the event.

⁹¹Other than the usual notations to a specific calendar date, references to periods of time, in particular to spans of time or numbers of years ago, are exceedingly rare in the record of Iroquois-Dutch relations until after the mid-seventeenth century. How the Iroquois may have measured time at contact is unknown. It is understood that, among American Indians generally, the passage of time was linked to specific natural or socio-historical events; in oral traditions, time is often truncated or expanded. However, persistent and long-term contact with Europeans, intent on keeping orderly records, undoubtedly led Indians to adopt something of their system of absolute chronology, if only as a safeguard for themselves. See David Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera* (Oxford, 1974); Jan Vansina, *Oral History* (Madison, Wis., 1985), 174–76; Shepard Krech III, “Bringing Linear Time Back In,” *Ethnohistory* 53.3 (2006): 567–93.

The peace agreement with the Dutch that Tokaháyon, Sganarády's grandfather, had attended as a delegate was held on the Normanskill, "to which place the *Mohawks* first came for the formation of the alliance." The five (actually six) "special chiefs" who were present included the Cayuga Togaháyon, the same name as Sganarády's grandfather, whom Pyrlaeus recorded as Tokaháyon.⁹² It could be assumed that these names are those of two different persons; however, it is likely that they refer to the same person. The difficulty is determining whether this man was present for both the alliance struck between the five Iroquois nations and that between the Iroquois and Dutch, or, that the two alliances are related and represent a single event. Further, the six "special chiefs" are precisely those whose names appear in the several versions of the Deganawidah epic presented above. Finally, there is the quandary over the meeting place where the alliances were struck. The gathering leading to the Iroquois-Dutch peace agreement took place "near the Nordmanns Kill . . . to which place the *Mohawks* first came for the formation of the alliance." Again, this statement suggests that there had been two separate events: first, the alliance between the five Iroquois nations, to which "the *Mohawks* first came," and second, the meeting resulting in the Indian-Dutch alliance. It is understood from the several versions of the Deganawidah epic, discussed above, that the journey of the Peacemaker and the acceptance of his message had begun with the Mohawks. As Pyrlaeus reported it, "[B]ecause the *Mohawks* had been the first to enter the alliance, their *titul[us]* in council is Tgarihógu, and this nation is called the brother." It will be recalled that *native-derived* accounts of the League's origins, from Pyrlaeus to Hale, all trace its beginnings to the Mohawk Valley or what was regarded as Mohawk territory. Enter, once again, Jacob Eelckens.

The historical record presented above confirms Eelckens's central role in the siting and building of Fort Nassau at the mouth of the Normanskill in 1614. That he organized and then expanded the trade in furs and, for a period of time, was in command of operations there is well established. Although Eelckens's immediate clients were the surrounding Mahicans and Munsees, it was down the Normanskill from their villages in the Mohawk Valley that Mohawks came with their furs.⁹³ Once Fort Nassau was abandoned, Eelckens continued on and

⁹²That Sganarády was a Mohawk and his grandfather a Cayuga does not complicate matters. The Iroquois traced descent through the mother's line.

⁹³The Normanskill was a route routinely taken by the Mohawks to reach the Hudson and also to trade with the Dutch. It was here that Mohawk warriors overwhelmed a party of Mahicans and Dutch in 1626, the opening skirmish of the Mohawk-Mahican War. See William A. Starna and José António Brandão, "From the Mohawk-Mahican War to the Beaver Wars: Questioning the Pattern," *Ethnohistory* 51.4 (2004): 725–50.

off to trade in the upper Hudson River. Returning on the *William* in the employ of an English company in 1633, Eelckens once again set up trading operations in what to him was familiar territory—near the Normanskill.⁹⁴ Equally important, however, is that it was on the Normanskill that, according to Sganarady, the alliance between the Iroquois and Dutch was negotiated. And finally, it was almost certainly at the mouth of the Normanskill that, according to the testimony of Iroquois headmen in the last third of the seventeenth century, a momentous event had taken place: “the first Instance of Navigation being in use here,” at the time of a governor called “Jacques,” who is said to have come “with a Ship into their Waters & rec^d them as Bretheren.”⁹⁵ Closing the circle then, with lines of both direct and circumstantial evidence, “Jacques” is assuredly Jacob Jacobsz Eelckens. And I propose that within the bounds of this circle and its well-documented historical context, lies the source of the Iroquois League.

FORMING THE LEAGUE

That great mythological charter—the Deganawidah epic—reveals that the League arose during a time of trouble and strife, when factionalism, war, and sorcery dominated Iroquois life. Despite that compelling narrative, scarcely anything of these conditions, which are said to have led to the appearance of the Peacemaker and the inception of the League, can be attested through the traditional methods of history. The task is made doubly difficult by the widely held belief that the League was formed and functioning a century or more before the arrival of Europeans. It comes as no surprise, then, that virtually all of the efforts made to confirm claims about the League’s presence and its reasons for being—including those founded in oral tradition—have been in archaeology. But even here the outcomes have been uncertain.

One approach of archaeology has been to discover when in the past the level of warfare as depicted in the Deganawidah epic may have prevailed, thus fixing a temporal threshold for the League’s genesis. Essential to this undertaking are several assumptions: that the Deganawidah epic is based on historical actuality; that what may have constituted warfare in the context of the epic is fully understood; that palisaded villages sited on defensible terrain are unambiguous indicators of hostilities; and that the endemic warfare described in the epic is signaled by evidence of prisoner sacrifice and ritual cannibalism.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ See Eekhof, *Bastiaen Jansz. Krol*, xxv–xxx.

⁹⁵ Richter, “Rediscovered Links,” 76, 81.

⁹⁶ See Engelbrecht, *Iroquoia*; Snow, *Iroquois*; Thomas S. Ablert and Michael H. Logan, “The Florescence and Demise of Iroquoian Cannibalism: Human Sacrifice and Malinowski’s

From the outset, there is no real way to determine the scale or kind of hostilities the Iroquois engaged in prior to European contact. And while some archaeologists have concluded that there is no evidence of pervasive warfare before the mid-fifteenth century, a consensus start date for the League, others maintain that intergroup conflict was a fact of life for many centuries before this. What is missing from the pre-Iroquois archaeological record, goes the argument, “is not evidence of violence, but rather of settled fortified villages.”⁹⁷ But if it is agreed that fortified villages are, in fact, concrete indicators of organized warfare of a sufficient level to meet the presumed requirements of the epic, then estimates for the beginning of the League must be pushed back at least another century to at minimum AD 1350.⁹⁸ This date, absent additional corroborating evidence, would be viewed by most historians as too early.

A more compelling reality, however, is that Iroquois villages did not complete their shift from dispersed, autonomous communities to tight clusters until AD 1560, making it impossible to speak of five discrete nations that might then have united into an alliance such as the League before then.⁹⁹ This information is of critical importance as it provides the *terminus post quem* for the formation of the League. It does not, however, alter my contention that the genesis of the League was a post-contact event. The multiple and independent lines of documentary evidence presented here securely fix the *terminus ante quem* in and about the second decade of the seventeenth century.

As for the intimate nature of warfare, scattered human bones, some burned and showing cut marks, along with artifacts fashioned from human bone, first appear in the archaeological record in the twelfth century.¹⁰⁰ Although prisoner sacrifice and ritual cannibalism are described

Hypothesis,” *Man in the Northeast* 35 (1988): 1–26; James W. Bradley, *Evolution of the Onondaga Iroquois: Accommodating Change, 1500–1655* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1987); Trigger, “Social and Political Organization.” See also Eric E. Jones, “Using Viewshed Analysis to Explore Settlement Choice: A Case Study of the Onondaga Iroquois,” *American Antiquity* 71.3 (2006): 523–38.

⁹⁷Engelbrecht, *Iroquoia*, 34–35. Compare Snow, *Iroquois*, 230–31n10, but see 31–33: “Archaeology can do little more than tell us whether or not warfare was common.” See also Trigger, “Social and Political Organization,” 33–35.

⁹⁸Snow, *Iroquois*, 29.

⁹⁹For Iroquois village clustering and the AD 1560 date, see Dean R. Snow, “GIS Applications in North America,” in *The Colloquia of the XIIIe Congrès International des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques, Vol. 1, Theoretical and Methodological Problems*, ed. Ian Johnson, 159–68 (Forlì, Italy, 1996); idem, “GIS and Northern Iroquoian Demography. Archaeological Applications of GIS,” *Proceedings of Colloquium II, UISPP XIIIth Congress, Archaeological Methods Series 5* (CD publication), ed. Ian Johnson (Forlì, Italy, 1997); idem, “The Lessons of Northern Iroquoian Demography,” in *Archaeology of the Appalachian Highlands*, ed. Lynne P. Sullivan and Susan C. Prezzano, 264–77 (Knoxville, Tenn., 2001).

¹⁰⁰Engelbrecht, *Iroquoia*, 43–44. Compare Snow, *Iroquois*, 38. For similar evidence from southern Ontario, see Christine F. Dodd, Dana R. Poulton, Paul A. Lennox, David G. Smith,

in historic accounts beginning in the first decades of the seventeenth century, and conceding the conservatism of non-state societies such as the Iroquois, it would nonetheless be risky to project such *specific* behaviors four or five centuries deeper into the past to explain these findings. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that after European observers had noticed and written about such practices, they continued unabated among the Iroquois (and other native people in the northeast) well into the eighteenth century.¹⁰¹

Complicating matters on the subject of warfare are hints early in the historical record that the League initially had not halted—although combined with other factors over time it did mitigate—hostilities or the threat of hostilities between the Iroquois nations. For example, in meetings with the Dutch in mid-June 1657, Mohawk headmen asked for horses to drag logs out of the woods so they could repair their palisades. This required doing “in case they should be involved in war with the *Sinnekes*”; moreover, in the event of a war they wanted permission to send their women and children to Fort Orange for protection.¹⁰² A historic enmity between the Onondagas and Mohawks is well documented. It was exacerbated by the arrival of Europeans and the fur trade.¹⁰³ What is even more significant, once established, the League did not deter Iroquois villages from pursuing their own self-interests, whether in the fur trade, in diplomacy, or in war. There was no recognition of a central authority at any level, nor did villages surrender their autonomy either to their nation or to the League council and its headmen.¹⁰⁴

By the first two decades of the seventeenth century, however, Iroquois warfare had reached a level and scope that may well satisfy the requirements of the Deganawidah epic. By then these Indians were fighting numerous native foes from in and around the St. Lawrence Valley, some of whom appear to have formed alliances with the French,

and Gary A. Warrick, “The Middle Ontario Iroquoian Stage,” in *The Archaeology of Southern Ontario to A.D. 1650*, ed. Chris J. Ellis and Neal Ferris, Occasional Publications of the London Chapter, Ontario Archaeology Society 5, pp. 321–59 (London, Ontario, 1990).

¹⁰¹ Abler and Logan, “Iroquoian Cannibalism”; Thomas S. Abler, “Iroquois Cannibalism: Fact Not Fiction,” *Ethnohistory* 27.4 (1980): 309–16.

¹⁰² See Gehring, *Court Minutes*, 304–06; O’Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 13:72–73. This episode coincides with complaints the Onondagas had made to the Dutch of being harassed by the Mohawks, as discussed below. “*Sinnekes*” (*Sinnekens* and var.) was used by the Dutch as a collective for the Iroquois nations living west of the Mohawks, here the Onondagas. Only later was it applied and restricted to the westernmost group, the Senecas. See Ives Goddard’s synonymy in Thomas S. Abler and Elisabeth Tooker, “Seneca,” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 15, Northeast* (see note 32), 51.

¹⁰³ Bradley, *Onondaga Iroquois*, 182–85; Jennings, *Iroquois Empire*, 105–09.

¹⁰⁴ See Fenton, *Great Law*; José António Brandão, “*Your fyre shall burn no more*”: *Iroquois Policy toward New France and Its Native Allies to 1701* (Lincoln, Neb., 1997); Richter, *Ordeal*; Jennings, *Iroquois Empire*.

received their armed support, and taken war to the very doorstep of Iroquoia. Period oral histories, Iroquoian and Algonquian alike, reflect the devastating nature of this conflict.¹⁰⁵

Archaeologists have also proposed that evidence for the League can be found in the distribution, frequency, and forms of native manufactured items, and also of European trade goods found on Iroquois sites. Here the working assumption is that the free exchange and movement of goods, for example, marine shell and clay smoking pipes, would first have required an arrangement—the establishment of an alliance—between Iroquois villages.¹⁰⁶ This basic pattern would also hold true for Indian-European trade. Goods would make their way to the villages of all five of the Iroquois nations, without impediment, only if they were linked in an alliance—the League.

Early in the seventeenth century, it has been reported, the kind and amount of European goods on Iroquois village sites assumed a noticeable similarity, suggesting regular contact between persons and groups. In line with this evidence is generated the hypothesis that peaceful relations would have allowed for an equitable distribution of these items among communities with less than direct access to their sources; moreover, their exchange would have acted to strengthen ties between League members.¹⁰⁷ Recent work suggests, however, that the sources of European trade goods and the manner in which these same goods may or may not have reached the Iroquois nations were much more varied and complex than previously thought. Furthermore, alliances of whatever

¹⁰⁵ Brandão, *Iroquois Policy*, 62–71.

¹⁰⁶ It has been proposed that marine shell is a material symbol of the Condolence Council; accordingly, as “one of the few archaeological correlates to this institution,” it is allegedly evidence of a functioning League. Robert D. Kuhn and Robert E. Funk, “Mohawk Interaction Patterns During the Late Sixteenth Century,” in Hayes, *Proceedings*, 77. See also Engelbrecht, *Iroquoia*, 132, and works cited therein. Small quantities of marine shell begin to appear on Mohawk sites in the fifteenth century. However, true wampum, which played an important role not only in the Condolence Council, but also in trade, diplomacy, other ceremony, and adornment, was neither an Iroquois invention nor present in any quantity until after contact. Fenton, *Great Law*, 226–27; Lynn Ceci, “The Value of Wampum among the New York Iroquois: A Case Study in Artifact Analysis,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 38.1 (1982): 97–107. There is no one-to-one correspondence between marine shell and the existence of the League. Smoking pipes, in particular those that were manufactured by men of one Iroquois nation but recovered from the sites of another, are said to signal not only exchange but, because of their presumed importance in political protocol, evidence for the League. There are any number of possible scenarios, other than activity within the League, that could explain the presence and timing of exotic pipe styles on Iroquois sites. Smoking pipes, it must be said, are not a precondition for, nor proof of, alliance formation. More problematical, as is the case with several other archaeological attestations, is that this hypothesis operates on the mistaken assumption that the League was already in existence and all that remains to be done is to find evidence for it. See Kuhn and Sempowski, “New Approach,” 301–14; Engelbrecht, *Iroquoia*, 133.

¹⁰⁷ Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada’s “Heroic Age” Reconsidered* (Montreal, 1985), 161; Engelbrecht, *Iroquoia*, 134–35; Bradley, *Onondaga Iroquois*, 104–05.

form were no guarantee that goods could or would flow freely between Iroquois villages.¹⁰⁸ Citing just one of several available examples, in 1656, a time when an alliance or league of some kind was operational, a party of (presumably) Onondagas showed up in the neighborhood of Manhattan with bundles of furs. Their more than two-week journey to trade had been necessary, they reported, because they had previously been harassed by Mohawks when they attempted to take the short route east from their villages to the Dutch at Fort Orange. To avoid any such trouble in the future, they petitioned Petrus Stuyvesant, the colony's director, for a trading post on the lower Hudson.¹⁰⁹

Ethnology and history have added little to what is known or understood about the League for all of the seventeenth, and well into the eighteenth, century. William Fenton put it best in the opening of his discussion on the Deganawidah epic and the League in *The Great Law and the Longhouse*: "How is it that something so basic to Iroquois political philosophy escaped the notice of early writers on Iroquois manners and usages? Are we to infer from the silence of colonial writers that the legend was unknown and the league was not functioning? Why, save for the hint of John Christopher Pyrlaeus, a Moravian missionary, have we to await the emergence of ethnology at the mid-nineteenth century for a description of the league's institutions and ceremonies?"¹¹⁰

These questions, of course, are not easily answered, although Fenton clearly identified the motives behind the codification and preservation of Iroquois culture, and the League, in the late nineteenth century. These issues, however, are beyond the scope of this essay.¹¹¹ To find an explanation, we must instead return to Pyrlaeus and the early history of New Netherland.

Contained in Pyrlaeus's account are the names of the "special chiefs" said by the Indian Sganarady to have struck an alliance with the Dutch.

¹⁰⁸ See James W. Bradley, *Before Albany: An Archaeology of Native-Dutch Relations in the Capital Region, 1600–1664*, New York State Museum Bulletin 509 (Albany, N.Y., 2007).

¹⁰⁹ William A. Starna, "Seventeenth-Century Dutch-Indian Trade: A Perspective from Iroquoia," *de Halve Maen* 59.3 (1986): 8, 21; Charles T. Gehring, trans. and ed., *Correspondence 1654–1658, Volume XII of the Dutch Colonial Manuscripts* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2003), 107. According to Jesuits in Canada, such ill treatment at the hands of the Mohawks sent the Onondagas north to trade with the French. Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 44:151.

¹¹⁰ Fenton, *Great Law*, 51.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 52 and passim. See also Shimony, *Conservatism*; Sally M. Weaver, "Six Nations of the Grand River, Ontario," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 15, Northeast* (see note 32), 525–36; ; *idem*, "The Iroquois: The Consolidation of the Grand River Reserve in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations*, ed. Edward S. Rogers and Donald B. Smith, 182–212 (Toronto, 1994); ; *idem*, "The Iroquois: The Grand River Reserve in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, 1875–1945," *ibid.*, 213–57.

Along with the council names of the Iroquois nations, they appear in a consistent fashion in most subsequent reportings. As far as can be determined, three of these six names are found in the historical record prior to Pyrlaeus's reckoning: Otatschéchte (Otatchette, Otachecté, Otacheté, Otasseté, Odat-sighte, Odaksichte, Odatrighte, Odatsichte, Odatsichta, Ondagsighte), first in 1688; Togaháyon (Dagaeyse), once in 1691; and Satagarúuyes (Sadegarees), once, also in 1691.¹¹² The others, obviously, are not; that is, in spite of the repetition of names in the several accounts subsequent to Pyrlaeus, they are, for all intents and purposes, absent from the voluminous record of colonial administrations, an absence that is not readily explained.¹¹³

There is also the meeting on the Normanskill that led to the alliance between deputies of the five Iroquois nations and the Dutch prior to Albany's founding, although no record of it was known to exist. Yet, in 1968, such a record did surface. This "treaty," the original of which has never been seen, is dated 21 April 1613, and begins, "Here at Tawagonshi," a location on the Normanskill. Among its provisions were the terms of a trading agreement between the Dutch and Iroquois. This document, however, is an elaborate hoax, exposed as such in 1987.¹¹⁴

What is also of interest is Sganarády's naming of the five Iroquois nations whose headmen had allegedly entered into an agreement with the Dutch at a time before the Dutch knew much of anything about these Indians. That is, it was not until the mid-1630s that the Dutch were made aware, took any notice of, or documented the Indians living west of the Mohawks and Oneidas, and even then, it is doubtful that they fully understood what they had been told about these native people. In the dead of winter 1634–35, three Dutchmen made their way from Fort Orange into the Mohawk Valley to learn what they could about a decline in the fur trade. While visiting an Oneida village, they had recited to them, in the Mohawk language, the first listing of the five Iroquois nations to then be put into a contemporary record. Before 1634–35 the Dutch routinely acknowledged the Mohawks and the Oneidas, often

¹¹² O'Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 9:385 (first name), 3:774 (second and third names).

¹¹³ The following three names from Pyrlaeus's list—and to the best of my knowledge no others—appear in the historic record after 1743 and to 1800: Pyrlaeus's Togaháyon = T'gaaju (1752), Togahaju (1766), Beauchamp, *Moravian Journals*, 141, 219; Tcka-eáyon (1756), Tegaia (1768), O'Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 7:133, 8:113. Pyrlaeus's Otatschéchte = Otatshete (1784), Franklin B. Hough, ed., *Proceedings of the Commissioners of Indian Affairs Appointed by Law for the Extinguishment of Indian Titles in the State of New York*, 2 vols. (Albany, N.Y., 1861), 1:39. Pyrlaeus's Tatotárho = Wathatodarho (1765), [William Johnson], *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, ed. James Sullivan et al., 14 vols. (Albany, N.Y., 1921–65), 11:709.

¹¹⁴ Charles T. Gehring, William A. Starna, and William N. Fenton, "The Tawagonshi Treaty of 1613: The Final Chapter," *New York History* 68.4 (1987): 373–93.

referring to the latter people as “Sinnekens” (var.); otherwise, the record is silent on those Iroquois whose villages lay farther west.¹¹⁵ Indeed, it was not until the mid-seventeenth century that the Dutch recognized the five Iroquois nations by name with any regularity.

In addition to the information from Pylaeus’s account just presented is the broader yet essential question of alliance and alliance formation. The force of the League’s place in history should not cloud the fact that before the arrival of the Peacemaker and his message, Iroquois communities did not stand in isolation from one another. This is in spite of the general lack of evidence of pre-contact inter-village trade—a traditional signifier of alliances—and a number of earlier, now dated, archaeological judgments.¹¹⁶ It remains likely that the most important variable in assessing the frequency and intensity of the different forms of social interaction leading to alliance formation is distance. That is, interactions between what are understood to be Mohawk and Oneida villages, for instance, were undoubtedly more common and perhaps more enduring than those between Mohawk and Cayuga or Seneca villages, a supposition that is partly borne out by linguistic and archaeological data.¹¹⁷

If there is, at minimum, a theoretical and practical universal among kin-based societies, it is their tendency to form alliances, whatever the reasons may be. The Iroquois were no exception, and although the evidence may be incomplete or imperfectly understood, there have long been suggestions that real or perceived external threats, the control of and access to resources, and patterns of marriage and residence—the inter-village movement of both men and women—all played important parts in pre-contact alliance formation. As archaeologist William Engelbrecht reminds us, “The emerging Iroquois nations were not closed entities, with individuals and groups neither entering nor leaving.” Thus, this generally acknowledged movement of people between villages, along with, for example, material goods, cultural behaviors, and ideas, is perforce predicated on some kind or several kinds of arrangements—alliances. However, we simply do not know how such arrangements came to be made or how they may have functioned.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Gehring and Starna, *Journey*, 16–17. While at the Oneida village the Dutchmen were told about the “ONNEDAEGES” (Onondagas). *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹⁶ See Trigger, “Social and Political Organization,” 31.

¹¹⁷ See Floyd G. Lounsbury, “Iroquoian Languages,” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 15, Northeast* (see note 32), 335–36.

¹¹⁸ Engelbrecht, *Iroquoia*, 128 and passim. See also Trigger, “Social and Political Organization”; Bradley, *Onondaga Iroquois*; Snow, *Iroquois*. An excellent example of the cultural dynamics surrounding the emergence of one of the Iroquois nations, the Mohawk, is Dean R. Snow, “Mohawk Demography and the Effects of Exogenous Epidemics on American Indian Populations,” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 15 (1996): 160–82.

Alliance formation was not limited to Indian-Indian arrangements. Employing the same social and political strategies and means, undoubtedly developed over many decades, made it a short step for Iroquois people to enter into similarly useful alliances with the recently arrived Dutch and, shortly thereafter, the French in Canada and the English. It was a matter of layering on justifications in response to challenges and to the relatively rapid cultural change that embraced native and European alike. And, to a considerable extent, the reasons behind the formation of alliances were not at all unfamiliar to these native people: to keep the peace or to join as allies for mutual protection or against a common enemy—Indian or European—and to sustain and facilitate the increasingly important trade. The oft-cited declaration made by Iroquois headmen to secretary for Indian affairs Peter Wraaxall in 1735—“Trade & Peace we take to be one thing”—typifies native and, it must be admitted, European views on what had become their interconnected worlds.¹¹⁹

The question of the source, that is, the impetus for and timing of the formation of the League, an alliance separate and distinct from all others that may have in the past linked Iroquois villages, cannot be satisfactorily answered solely on the basis of the Deganawidah epic—not if the traditional methods of history are to be employed. Many historians, nonetheless, have hedged their bets by acknowledging the significance of the epic in approaching an understanding of Iroquois culture history, while at the same time placing heavy reliance on “upstreaming” Lewis Henry Morgan’s patterned and regularized portrayal of the League well into the fifteenth century. Once held, this position is then tempered by the often repeated, theoretically and factually unassailable qualification, that the formation of the League was a process and not a single event.¹²⁰ None of this should be taken to mean that Iroquois voices not be heard; nor should the early historic record be set aside in deference to a plainly synchronic mid-nineteenth-century accounting and all that followed and acted to sustain it. Although their words were put to paper by Europeans, it is the history offered by Iroquois headmen to colonial officials in the second half of the seventeenth century and the testimony of Sganarady in the 1740s that complete the story.

To begin, the genesis of the League, as described in the empirically unreachable Deganawidah epic and as searched for by historians using the epic as a guide, was in all likelihood not a pre-contact phenomenon.

¹¹⁹ McIlwain, *An Abridgment*, 195.

¹²⁰ See, for example, Richter, “Ordeals,” 16, and *Ordeal*, 31–32; Fenton, *Great Law*, 72; Engelbrecht, *Iroquoia*, 130; Tooker, “League,” 418–22.

To this is added the inutility, thus far, of archaeological models and evidence to detect the League with any surety in the pre-contact period. It is proposed here, nonetheless, that the *raison d'être* of the League has been tied by Iroquois people themselves to events surrounding the Dutch trade early in the seventeenth century: An alliance—the League—may have been created, in substantial part, as a response to the fur trade and the need to have a strong socioeconomic system by which a more effective redistribution of trade goods would be ensured.¹²¹ Although not of immediate moment to this essay, it is also suggested that other factors acted to reinforce over time what became the League's stated purpose—to secure the unity of the Iroquois. The most widely favored explanation of virtually every modern historian has been European incursions into the northeast, to which may be added threats posed by other Indians. Not examined but worthy of serious consideration are the effects of severe post-contact population loss from epidemic disease, well documented for Iroquois communities, in particular the Mohawks.¹²² Although not a precise analogy, a nevertheless informative example of just such a circumstance comes from the history of the Creek confederacy, which did not begin to coalesce, pointing to emerging cooperation between local polities, until European-introduced diseases had sharply reduced the population of the interior southeast. This devastation took place about the same time that England, Spain, and France began their rivalry over the region. Lending weight to this point of view is that assertions that the Creek confederacy existed earlier remain unconfirmed by archaeological or historical research.¹²³ Notwithstanding, over time and with its considerable capacity to skillfully adapt itself ideologically and structurally to rapidly changing circumstances, the League functioned as, and would remain, an Iroquois invention.

The three meetings discussed previously—in 1678, 1689, and 1691—between one or more of the Iroquois nations and officials in Albany where “Jacques” was named, occurred during the English administra-

¹²¹ See the discussion in Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago, 1972), 185–230.

¹²² See Snow, “Mohawk Demography,” and *Iroquois*, 109–11; Dean R. Snow and William A. Starna, “Sixteenth-Century Depopulation: A View from the Mohawk Valley,” *American Anthropologist* 91 (1989): 142–49.

¹²³ See Willard B. Walter, “Creek Confederacy Before Removal,” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 14, Southeast*, ed. Raymond D. Fogelson, 374–75 (Washington, D.C., 2004); Vernon J. Knight Jr., “The Formation of the Creeks,” in *The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521–1704*, ed. Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser, 373–92 (Athens, Ga., 1994). Patricia Galloway, “Confederacy as a Solution to Chiefdom Dissolution: Historical Evidence in the Choctaw Case,” *ibid.*, 393–420, makes a similar argument for a politically more complex people.

tion of what had been the colony of New Netherland.¹²⁴ Less than three weeks after the takeover from the Dutch on 6 September 1664, an agreement was entered into with the “Maques” and the “Synicks” [Sinnkens] that they “shall have all such wares and commodities from the English for the future, as heretofore they had from the Dutch.”¹²⁵ This appears to be the only known compact made between the English and at least some of the Iroquois until the renewal of the covenant that was said to have begun with Jacques, first mentioned in 1678. Several earlier treaties had been concluded with Iroquois people during the time the Dutch held the colony, none of which name Eelckens or a person called “Jacques.” The first is known only by a reference from a 1659 council with the Mohawks, where the Dutch spokesman recounted that sixteen years had passed since their “first treaty of friendship and brotherhood.”¹²⁶ But no treaty with any Iroquois nation from 1643 survives, although it is possible that, for whatever reasons, the spokesman failed to correctly describe the event: in April 1643 the Dutch had concluded a treaty of peace with the Indians of the lower Hudson Valley.¹²⁷

There is little doubt that for trade to be properly and efficaciously conducted between native people and entities such as the New Netherland Company, arrangements of some sort would have been necessary. The kinds of exchange that non-state, fundamentally egalitarian-to-ranked

¹²⁴ Supporting this chronology is the document “Propositions made by the Schaahkooks Indians the 24th of Sep^r 1703.” Lawrence H. Leder, ed., *The Livingston Indian Records, 1666–1723* (Gettysburg, Pa., 1956), 191. Therein is this declaration: “It is now Eighty five years since y^e first Christian came here in this Countrey then wee tyed them with a Roap but now they are fastned with an Iron Chain to y^e tree of welfair so that wee hitherto have stood firm to y^e Covenant Chain with our father.” This puts the date of the arrival of Europeans on the upper Hudson at 1618. Of special note is a mention of these early agreements by Sir William Johnson while attending his first conference at Onondaga in 1748: “It may seem strange to you how I a Foreigner should know this,” he told the assembled chiefs of the five Iroquois nations. “But I tell you I found out some of the old Writings of our Forefathers which was thought to have been lost and in this old valuable Record I find, that our first Friendship Commenced at the Arrival of the first great Canoe or Vessel at Albany, at which you were much surprized but finding what it contained pleased you so much being Things for your Purpose.” [William Johnson, *Papers*, 1:158.

¹²⁵ O’Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 3:67. There were, nonetheless, several meetings recorded for this period where propositions or representations were made by delegations from one or more Iroquois groups or by English officials, but these do not meet the test of a treaty or covenant.

¹²⁶ Gehring, *Court Minutes*, 457. In early summer 1645, Dutch governor Kieft traveled to Fort Orange to meet with Mohawks, Mahicans, and other unnamed natives. A record of this conference, along with a nineteenth-century translation, was lost in the 1911 New York State Library fire; however, a summary based on these materials appears in E. B. O’Callaghan, *History of New Netherland; or, New York Under the Dutch*, 2 vols. (New York, 1846), 1:355–56. There was a second peace treaty concluded between the Dutch and the River Indians, in the presence of Mohawk deputies acting as mediators, in August 1645. O’Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 13:18.

¹²⁷ O’Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 13:14.

societies such as the Iroquois entered into were complex and potentially volatile affairs embedded in mutual suspicion and unease. Thus, for trade to occur a social relationship or a social strategy first needed to be established, replete with all of the attendant protocols, what Marshall Sahlins referred to as “status etiquette.”¹²⁸ Basic to the process is the concept of reciprocity and a direct exchange between the parties in which social and economic interests are served, usually without delay. It is unlikely, then, that trade between, for example, the Mohawks and Jacob Eelckens and his crew would or could have taken place without an agreement and its associated conventions. Eelckens, in turn, presumably conducted the trade in compliance with directives prescribed by the company for which he worked, which operated under a charter issued by the States General in the Netherlands.¹²⁹ Whether they may have extended to his interactions with Indians is unknown. By 1625 and the appointment of Willem Verhulst as director of the colony, explicit instructions had been promulgated on how best to deal with Indian traders.¹³⁰

At this juncture it is important to recognize that the several references to Jacques and the associated early covenant in the statements of Iroquois headmen to English officials were undoubtedly intended as reminders of past agreements. This was a practice altogether familiar to Europeans, but also to the Iroquois, whose own systems of protocol made use of a reiterative formulary—customarily employing mnemonic devices such as strings of wampum, kernels of corn, or short sticks held in the hand—to recall events from past councils or other gatherings.¹³¹ As for the Europeans, the “Articles of Surrender,” which ushered in the English takeover in September 1664, carried over the full range of agreements and contracts made during the Dutch administration of the colony. Moreover, the October 1664 treaty between the English and Iroquois representatives ensured the Indians’ access to trade goods “as heretofore they had from the Dutch.”¹³² This continuity in form and substance was of obvious importance to all of the parties involved.

¹²⁸ Sahlins, *Economics*, 186. Although no descriptions of early Iroquois trade are found in the literature, analogies can be drawn relatively securely to the Huron. See Elisabeth Tooker, *An Ethnography of the Huron Indians, 1615–1649*, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 190 (Washington, D.C., 1964), 25–31; Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic*, 1:62–65.

¹²⁹ Jacobs, *New Netherland*, 34–36; Hart, “Prehistory,” 33–34.

¹³⁰ A.J.F. van Laer, trans. and ed., *Documents Relating to New Netherland 1624–1626 in the Henry E. Huntington Library* (San Marino, Ca., 1924), 39, 52.

¹³¹ See generally Jennings et al., *Iroquois Diplomacy*.

¹³² For “Articles of Surrender Consented to by Colonel Nicolls, His Delegates, and Director General Stuyvesant’s Delegates,” see Peter R. Christoph and Florence A. Christoph, eds., *Book of General Entries for the Colony of New York, Vol. 1: 1664–1673* (Baltimore, Md., 1980), 35–37. O’Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, 3:67.

As a matter of legitimacy and validation, the continuity of agreements would be dependent on a point of origin; that is, they should be traceable to a first instance, to a time when the agreement was first struck. From the point of the view of the Iroquois, that first agreement had been with Jacob Jacobsz Eelckens at Fort Nassau. It is of little consequence that those first documented references to the covenant by Iroquois headmen in the last third of the seventeenth century did not mention that the participants were limited to Eelckens, on the part of the New Netherland Company, and unknown Mohawks. The remaining four Iroquois nations were most likely out of the picture, at least at this early date.

RECAPITULATION

A fair reading of the historical evidence presented calls into question the accepted, mainstream explanations for the origins and presumed prototypic structure of the Iroquois League. As a handful of scholars have acknowledged, neither Morgan's 1851 portrayal of the League, nor those of Hale and others that followed, all in near lockstep, can be found in the documentary record from either the seventeenth or the eighteenth century. Yet the notion persists among many historians, insisted on and fostered by Iroquois leaders, nativists, and intellectuals, that the Great Peace, accompanied by its "constitutional" counterpart, the Great Law; the League; its fifty hereditary sachems and their titles; and all the rest, did exist in the regularized manner so often described from a time much before the arrival of Europeans in the New World. Persuading many to defer to these claims are certain Iroquois oral traditions linked to the received sanctity of the Deganawidah epic, which is taken to be not only the ideological but also the historical underpinning of the League's genesis and evolution. But once the epic is set aside, there is nothing in the historical or archaeological record that would confirm the existence of the League before contact. On this basis, then, it would be unrealistic to expect historians to accept oral accounts describing events set deep in the past without independent, corroborating evidence.¹³³

What the Deganawidah epic most probably and surely not surprisingly represents is a form of myth built around various bits and pieces of history—real events—that for Iroquois people required exposition, synthesis, and then rationalization. Myths, of course, are widely acknowledged by scholars to be a means by which people the world over

¹³³ On oral traditions and oral histories, see David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London, 1982).

explain the origins of one thing or another. Their fundamental purpose, it has been argued, is to provide a concurrent or *post factum* justification, a frame of reference, for what goes on in a society. More specifically, myths explicate and historicize relationships of a social and ceremonial nature within the framework of a symbolically charged narrative. The revealed “history,” however, represents less a chronicle of past events than it does a cultural charter, situating the group and its activities in a knowable and continually evolving social environment.¹³⁴

On the other hand, all of the lines of documented evidence relevant to the League’s origins and purpose do, without question, converge on one place and one time: the early Dutch trade conducted initially with the Mohawks and local Algonquians at the mouth of the Normanskill in the second decade of the seventeenth century. And what is of great significance, it was the Iroquois themselves who provided the clues and told the tale: Sganarády to Pyrlaeus in 1743; the chiefs gathered at Onondaga in the presence of Conrad Weiser the same year; and Iroquois headmen in the last third of the seventeenth century, who reminded officials in Albany of a man named Jacques, whose ship, loaded with goods to trade, had sailed into their world, and with whom they had forged a first covenant.

The most difficult matter to address, however, is what to do with the Deganawidah epic, the details surrounding the League’s origins that it describes, and, given its status as a sacred text, its meaning to Iroquois people and also interested historians. It must be conceded, after all, that although the story line and meaning behind the epic are clearly stated, nothing is known about the timing of its appearance or its dynamics through time, that is, its historical and ideological unfolding. The epic obviously plays a role in understanding the nature of the League, yet it cannot stand alone as evidence. Nor can history, some would perhaps argue. However, neither of these black and white options is being suggested here.

The seventeenth-century world view of the Iroquois was, of course, in its most expansive spatial and temporal context and perceived reality, rational. Actual events—the current of news flowing in all directions with the arrival of the *Fortuyn* and Jacob Jacobsz Eelckens, and the building of Fort Nassau—would of necessity have been incorporated into that world view so as to make sense not only of the initial event but also of what followed. The covenant with Jacques on the Normanskill was the starting point for the initiation and then expansion of alliances that eventually encompassed and involved all five Iro-

¹³⁴ See Vansina, *Oral History*, 23–24; Knight, “Formation of the Creeks,” 377.

quois nations. This strikingly new, momentous experience would have been woven into a familiar ideological domain, a process that we unfortunately can know nothing about. The first person known to offer any sort of explanation was the Mohawk Sganarády. The elements of his account and the more than a century of history that preceded its presentation to Pyrlaeus in 1743, offer strong support to the idea that the genesis of the League is tied directly to the arrival of the Dutch and the trade at Fort Nassau. The rest was process and evolution, as evidenced by the historical record and as told to us by Iroquois people.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank José António Brandão, Martha Dickinson Shattuck, and Dean Snow for reading and offering helpful comments on early drafts of this essay. Not only did my longtime confederate Jack Campisi read the final draft, more importantly, he encouraged me to take on the task in the first place. On matters concerning the history of New Netherland, I benefited from discussions with friend and colleague Charles Gehring. Marianne Mithun and Hanni Woodbury generously (and patiently) provided guidance on linguistic matters. I am most grateful to Corinna Dally-Starna, whose translations of Moravian mission records from the period and, in particular, her transcription and translation of the excerpt from Pyrlaeus's dictionary, were essential in the formulation and writing of this essay.