

**The World on the Back of the Turtle:**

*Diplomatic Relations of the Iroquois Confederacy, 1609 – 1701*

by

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### **Abstract**

A study in the diplomatic evolution of the Iroquois Confederacy's interactions with neighbouring First Nations and European colonists during the tumultuous period which followed their defeat at Lake Champlain. This project follows their subsequent transformation from a prominent regional force to their sudden collapse as a polity of power, analyzed from an indigenous perspective. Maintaining this position of prominence meant being able to adapt to the ways in which the European presence changed their world, coupled with their ability to manage the difficulties these challenges posed to their cultural and social institutions. Relationships with the Dutch, French and English cast the illusion of strengthening the Confederacy, when in reality they weakened the fundamental structures of Iroquoia needed to maintain the polity – ultimately transforming the once feared Confederacy into a weakened nation forced to sue for peace in order to secure its survival.

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Lastly it is with heavy-heart that I wish to dedicate this project to the memory of Jillian Vassallo. Thank you for all the wonderful years, beloved memories, and important lessons which you taught me. Know that you remain a constant inspiration to me, and that there is not a day in which I don't miss you.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Chapter One:</b> The History of the Iroquois before European Settlement.....	5
<b>Chapter Two:</b> The Iroquois and the Dutch.....	14
<b>Chapter Three:</b> The Iroquois and the French.....	31
<b>Chapter Four:</b> The Iroquois and the English.....	41
Bibliography.....	58

From the time of its formation until the era of European settlement, the Iroquois Confederacy was an undeniable presence to both the First Nations and their European counterparts who inhabited the north-eastern woodlands of America. This remarkable indigenous polity would in time come to inhabit a prominent place in the modern public's consciousness of Canadian folklore and popular history (albeit often in the role of villains, such as in the much romanticised tale of Dollard des Ormeaux). However, the intricacies of the Iroquois Confederacy, and its relationship to the world cannot be merely condensed to the role of common literary templates. This complex society would ascend to the role of regional power through its relationships with European traders, laying waste to rival nations while adopting old world perspectives towards territorial expansion and organized warfare. These interactions would come at a cost. Their repercussions on Iroquoian society would slowly push this ambiguous state towards its inevitable collapse.

This is the phenomenon with which this work is concerned. Assuming that the 1701 Great Peace of Montréal was a pivotal turning point in Iroquois history, marking their collapse as a regional power and influence and marking the start of their humiliating decline as the prominent player in the north-eastern woodlands. This period starts with the Confederacy's first encounter with Europeans and European technology during the Battle of Lake Champlain in 1609 and its immediate fallout which saw the Iroquois desperately seek to establish regular trade relations with the Dutch settlers along the Hudson River. In their attempt to monopolize trade with the Dutch, the Iroquois found themselves devastated by disease and in worsening relations with neighbouring tribes through a series of increasingly ferocious campaigns of inter-tribal wars.

Following the Dutch withdrawal, the Iroquois were forced to pursue a new relationship with the English, one which would prove to be even more damaging to the Confederacy. Ever increasing warfare, territorial expansion, and worsening relations with all entities other than the English would inevitably push the Iroquois to their limits and force them to sue for peace with the French and her native allies, marking the end of this golden age for the Iroquois Confederacy. It is predominately this phenomena of how a polity – superior in population, vastly knowledgeable of its region, and noticeably efficient in battle – could have been undermined and ultimately defeated by European and Native forces which were of such lesser size, resources, and prominence, which this work seeks to explore. Chiefly this work will break from contemporary historiography by attempting to present an analysis of the Confederacy’s collapse from an internal perspective rather than one drawn from the experience of the colonists. What follows therefore is a discussion of the intricacies of the Confederacy’s diplomatic relations with neighbouring First Nations and European traders. Analyzing how these relationships would eventually weaken, to the point of neutrality, what until then had been the most prominent indigenous polity north of the Rio Grande.

### **Chapter I**

#### *The History of the Iroquois before European Settlement.*

Prior to further analysis of the Iroquois and their diplomatic relations, a brief overview of the nation’s pre-contact history is in order to facilitate a proper understanding of what the Confederacy was, and to better understand both the nature of Iroquoia and how it came to prominence. One of the great challenges to this endeavour is the broad range of terminology which will emerge in this work. For example, the word

*Iroquois* itself is not of native origin but rather is thought to be derived from the Basque word *Hilokoa* (which roughly translates as “killer people”). It is believed that this word was coined by early Basque fur traders in the St. Lawrence region, and was then passed on to the French through a similar pidgin-language the Algonquians had used to conduct business with both the Basque and French fur traders.<sup>1</sup>

The term has been adopted in modern days to refer to the large number of languages which can be derived from the Iroquoian language family. The term *Iroquois* can therefore refer not only to the Iroquois Confederacy, with which this work concerns itself, but to neighbouring nations which were not a part of this polity but which shared a common culture and similar language (such as the Huron, Eries, and Susquehannocks, to name only a few). Therefore the term *Iroquois* is not to be confused with the term *Iroquois Confederacy*, which itself refers to five specific Iroquoian nations: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. They together formed what is usually referred to as the *Great League of Peace and Power*, or, more simply, the *Five Nations Confederacy*. This Confederacy identified itself through several other titles such as the *Ongwehon:we* (“humans who are human,”<sup>2</sup> which would seem to indicate a sense of contempt towards other nations). The most common identification often appears to be the *Haudenosaunee*, which roughly translates as “the whole house.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Several historians have cited several archaeological sites found along the St. Lawrence shores throughout the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which suggested an early Basque presence in the new world potentially pre-dating French settlement. Prior to the advancement of this belief it had been suggested that “Iroquois” had been derived from derogative Algonquin or French terms. More recent works such as Jon Parmenter (*The Edge of the Woods*, page 12) point out that the lack of an /l/ sound in the Algonquin tongue would have turned the pronunciation of “Hilokoa” into “Hirokoa”.

<sup>2</sup> Bryan D. Cummins, *First Nations First Dog* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 2002), 216.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 30.

The cosmology of this culture believed their world to rest upon the back of a turtle. Its first inhabitant was a spirit named “Sky Woman.” The creation of all things useful to the Iroquois (such as game and corn) and likewise the Iroquois themselves, is believed to be the work of Sky Woman’s first child, whereas anything harmful to the Iroquois (such as vermin or storms) is believed to be the product of a second, evil child.<sup>4</sup> Deciphering the historical origins of the Iroquois peoples and likewise, the Confederacy itself, has been achieved through the combination of oral accounts such as these along with additional research through linguistics, and the existing archaeological record.

While migration theories of the Iroquois have been numerous most, such as the one put forward by Arthur Parker that the ancestral Iroquois traveled east through southern Ontario, have been widely discredited in recent years. The most widely accepted theory today is the controversial work of archaeologist Richard MacNeish who first advanced the *in situ* theory of the Iroquois origins, arguing that Iroquoian culture did not migrate into the north-eastern woodlands but rather developed there.<sup>5</sup> MacNeish’s controversial theory was validated when William Ritchie, himself a former student of Parker, was able to collect a number of pottery designs similar to Iroquoian style that were present in villages which lacked many Iroquoian traits (such as palisade perimeters or signs of extensive agricultural activity). Ritchie attributed these sites to an extinct culture he labelled “Owasco,” and whose origins he dated to approximately 1000 AD.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This creation story has been passed down for generations and was first transcribed by Father Gabriel Sagard in *The Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons* [1632], ed. G.M. Wrong (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1939), 169.

<sup>5</sup> For an in depth overview of the archaeological debate over the Iroquoian peoples origins consult Dean R. Snow, *The Iroquois* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 10 – 19.

<sup>6</sup> William Ritchie, “Iroquois Archaeology and Settlement Patterns” in *Bureau of American Ethnography Bulletin*. No. 180 (1961): p. 27 – 38.

This theory of the Iroquoian cultural evolution from the Owasco can be further reinforced by linguistic evidence, which itself can in turn provide further insight into Owasco culture. The Iroquoian language family consists of two branches, Northern Iroquoian which is spoken by the Iroquois nations in the north-east (the Confederacy, Huron, Susquehannocks, and others) along with Southern Iroquoian (spoken by the Tuscarora and Cherokee nations of Tennessee and the Carolinas). The considerable differences in the Cherokee language and the languages of the Confederacy would seem to indicate that the original Iroquoian language was split approximately 4000 years ago, prior to the adoption of horticultural practices.<sup>7</sup> Before the northern Iroquois split into the many nations which inhabited the north-east at the time of European settlement, there appears to have been a common language and culture shared by all North Iroquoian peoples.<sup>8</sup>

The emergence of the longhouse by approximately 1400 AD would further seem to indicate both a dramatic increase in agricultural yields and that smaller communities were beginning to merge into larger communities by this point in time.<sup>9</sup> These mergers would likely have caused Iroquoian cultures to gradually split from each other and form the individual nations with which we are familiar today. This claim is backed up by the archaeological record which further indicates a continuing and substantial growth in population between these early sites. It is likely then that growing pressures on resources

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<sup>7</sup> This is based off the work of F.G. Lounsbury who points out that horticultural root words (such as the terms for corn and harvest) are shared by northeastern Iroquois nations but not by southern. See F.G. Lounsbury, "Iroquoian Languages" in *Northeast*, ed. by Bruce Trigger (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1978), 334 – 343.

<sup>8</sup> This is based off the same work with linguistic root structures by F.G. Lounsbury.

<sup>9</sup> Snow 40.

available to the growing Iroquoian population led these nations into a cycle of feuding, vengeance, and violence in order to assert control over resources.

Earlier theories of the origins of the Iroquois were derived in part by the Confederacy's common image in popular history as a militaristic nation. Archaeologists and historians had therefore pegged these peoples as an invasive force in the north-east, who displaced the original inhabitants of the St. Lawrence Valley. The new archaeological discoveries from Owasco sites have suggested that the development of intensive warfare in Iroquois culture was something of a relatively new occurrence. This is a notion reinforced by the oral history of the Confederacy.

According to the oral accounts of the Great League of Peace and Power's creation, the divergence of Iroquoian nations was followed by a "generations-long conflict" which promoted the emergence of a militaristic tradition. "Feuds with outer nations, feuds with brother nations, feuds of sister towns and feuds of families and of clans made every warrior a stealthy man who liked to kill."<sup>10</sup> Europeans such as French ethnographer Joseph François Lafitau observed that for the Iroquois, war was not merely orchestrated for the same reasons as in European cultures, but rather it was "indispensable to them... as one of their fundamental laws of being."<sup>11</sup> Even early Basque traders in the region came to know the Iroquois as a murderous people from their Algonquin trade partners' portrayal of the Confederacy. It is certainly undeniable that from this anarchic period of Iroquoia's history many of the iconic cultural elements of Iroquoian society emerged. This include the building of palisade perimeters around their

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Gookin, "Historical Collections of the Indians in New England" from *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* [1792], 141 – 226.

<sup>11</sup> Father Joseph François Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians compared with the customs of primitive times* [1724] (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1974), 84 – 85.

villages as a means of defence, and the practice of mourning wars, a process by which the Iroquois would raid neighbouring tribes in order to kidnap individuals for the purpose of eventually assimilating their victims into the tribe to replace individuals who had been lost in either conflict, disaster, or to disease.

The Confederacy's origin story asserts that a man named Hiawatha (who is either of the Onondaga or Mohawk nation depending upon which version of the story is consulted) became so stricken with grief following the death of his children during this period of conflict that he abandoned his village to wander the woods. During this time, he came into the company of a Huron named Deganawida, who would later become known as the Great Peacemaker, and who also had grown tired of the continuing violence in the region. This conflict was not likely confined solely to the territories of the Five Nations, but in all likelihood involved all Iroquoian peoples as their similar cultures would have made the assimilation process of mourning wars easier for its participants, and the common practice of intensive agriculture would have presented similar population constraints upon all of Iroquoian nations within this confined region.<sup>12</sup>

Deganawida introduced Hiawatha to a series of rituals which helped him to make peace with his losses, and in the pursuit of spreading these new rituals around the Iroquoian lands Hiawatha and Deganawida traveled from village to village. This story, which is often retold with only minor differences, always concludes with the conversion of Tadodaho, who is described as a vicious but respected and often greatly feared chief of the Onondaga. He would be the last chief of the five nations of the Confederacy to accept

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<sup>12</sup> Snow, 58 – 60.

Deganawida's "ways of the great peace". Tadodaho's acceptance of this ideology signifies the official formation of the Great League of Peace and Power.<sup>13</sup>

The League itself was governed by "The Great Law of Peace", a 117 – point constitution laid down by Deganawida which was designed predominately to prevent a re-occurrence of conflict between nations who practiced it. The articles of the Great Law predominately concern themselves with matters of societal structure, ownership and mediation, and some vague notions of personal responsibility. What emerged from this was a federal – like structure which established its members as equal partners and further divided each nation into three tribes. These were identified as the Tortoise, Bear, and Wolf tribes which, like the Confederacy's nations themselves, were also of equal status.<sup>14</sup> The tribes themselves were led by Sachems who made the critical decisions in their domestic affairs; however, to retain their position, they would have to appease families of high standing who could take this title from them and grant it to others. Matters of foreign affairs were less defined. While individual nations and often individual tribes could pursue relationships independently, the League would declare wars together and the Sachems would meet at the central village of the Onondaga nation to discuss among other issues, matters of war.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, some historians such as Dean R. Snow believe that the formation of the Great League of Peace and Power can be dated using a combination of the existing archaeological and astronomical records in relation to the origin story. According to the Tale of the Peacemaker, the Mohawk were the first to accept the Great law of Peace,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> This is derived from observations made on the governing structure of the Confederacy as described in Cadwallader Colden's "The History of the Five Indian Nations" which was first published in two separate volumes in 1727 & 1747. His work was republished by Cornell University Press in 1964.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

followed closely by the Onondaga and Seneca, with the Oneida and Cayuga following much later. The story claims that while the Seneca debated accepting the Great Law of Peace, a solar eclipse occurred. Snow believes this eclipse to be the one that occurred on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1142 over the Seneca territory.<sup>16</sup> This interpretation is debateable, however, and others have argued that this is simply much too early a date. Those who argue this have themselves dated the formation of the League to sometime between 1450 – 1600.<sup>17</sup>

Most oral accounts transcribed by Europeans make it clear that the Iroquois were a people who placed a heavy importance on the pursuit of peace. The purpose of the League's formation was never to assert dominance in the region but to ensure that peace between its members continued to reign, to keep Iroquoia from ever falling into such a disastrous period of perpetual mourning wars and violence again. Despite this, Europeans came to see the Iroquois as a militaristic nation. This view was as a response to both the turbulent relationship between the Iroquois and Europeans, along with the extensive exposure to the Algonquin peoples to the east whose relations with the Iroquois prior to the arrival of Europeans had been steadily souring.

Cadwallader Colden's account of Iroquois history asserts that sometime long after the League's formation, Iroquois hunters had joined the Algonquins on a hunt during a season of poor catches. The Algonquins had come to view the Iroquois as a lazy people because of their horticultural practices (however, as Algonquin accounts tend to omit this notion, and some Algonquin peoples such as the Mi'Kmaq did practice some level of agriculture themselves this is more likely a bias towards a rival nation which

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<sup>16</sup> Snow, 58 – 60.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse* (Williamsburg: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 39.

developed in Iroquois versions of this event).<sup>18</sup> The Iroquois account claims that when their hunters produced greater catches, their embarrassed counterparts murdered them in the night, resulting in yet another cycle of mourning wars – although Algonquin accounts claim it was their hunters who were the victims. Regardless of who started this conflict, what resulted was a steadily growing series of revenge-fuelled conflicts which culminated in out-right warfare.

Furthermore, there is evidence such as the participation of Huron warriors in the Battle of Lake Champlain, which would indicate that Iroquois nations who had not joined the Confederacy remained somewhat hostile towards it. Oral accounts of the Susquehannocks indicate that fellow Iroquois nations remained hostile towards the League following the Great Mourning War Conflict, which made the Susquehannocks allies of the Algonquins. What is important to take from this is that, excluding the period of the Great Mourning War Conflict, there is no evidence to suggest a continued period of warfare in Iroquoia prior to the beginning of the Algonquin Conflict. While the Confederacy was capable of withstanding continued skirmishes with the eastern Algonquins, Iroquois society was itself by no means adjusted to a perpetual state of warfare – nor would it be able to withstand it in the coming future.

In the summer of 1609 everything changed for Iroquoia when a Mohawk war party traveled to Lake Champlain to engage their Algonquin and Huron enemies. Such skirmishes appear to have been common occurrence and the Mohawk, even if they returned defeated, would likely not have expected to face many losses. As was common in traditional indigenous warfare, the Mohawk war party established a palisade camp

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<sup>18</sup> Diana Muir counter-argues that the Iroquois were an invasive force whose constant threat drove the eastern Algonquins to adopt some agricultural practices in *Reflections in Bullough's Pond* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 261 – 263.

along the lake's shore and in the morning went to meet the enemy. Among the usual ranks of the Algonquins and Huron, the Mohawk found three men who clearly stood apart in dress alone. The Algonquin and Huron warriors parted ways to produce a path indicating to both the strangers and the Mohawk that these strange men had been bought here as an important component for the Algonquins in this battle. As the Mohawks raised their bows, one of the men, the founder of New France, Samuel de Champlain, raised his arquebus and opened fire upon the Mohawk. It took only three shots to bring down three of the Mohawk chiefs before any damage could even be dealt to the Algonquin and Huron warriors. The battle proved to be short lived and a Mohawk retreat quickly followed, granting their enemies a monumental victory, the speed of which had likely never been experienced before.<sup>19</sup>

## **Chapter 2**

### *The Iroquois and the Dutch*

A year prior to the Battle of Lake Champlain, in 1608, the French, under Samuel de Champlain, established a permanent post at Québec, right in the heart of the Algonquin-speaking people's homeland. That same year, a party of English settlers under the command of John Smith, following the successful establishment of Jamestown further south, traveled north to the head of Chesapeake Bay. Here they encountered delegates of the Susquehannock nation who provided the English with their first description of the Iroquois Confederacy – referring to them as the “Massawomekes”, the Susquehannock's mortal enemy.<sup>20</sup> The following year in 1610, around the same time as the first

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<sup>19</sup> For a complete account of the Battle of Lake Champlain see Samuel de Champlain, *The Works of Samuel de Champlain Volume 2* [1608 – 1612] (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1971), Chapter IX pages 82 – 101.

<sup>20</sup>Quote can be found in Philip L. Barbour, ed., *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith: 1580 – 1631* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1986), 150. A more comprehensive collection of the descriptions provided to the English of the “Massawomekes” by tribes of the Chesapeake Bay area can be

engagement of the Iroquois with Europeans, Henry Hudson laid claim to the Hudson River for the Dutch, giving rise to the colony of New Netherlands in the heart of Mahican territory.

European settlements had already been established by the time of the Battle of Lake Champlain and by 1700 these settlements would effectively form a horseshoe around Iroquoia. Furthermore, the archaeological record tells us that European goods, albeit in small quantities, had begun to arrive in Iroquoia prior to any formal contact between the Confederacy and Europeans was established. As was common with indigenous trade at the time, this material usually took the form of native goods reworked with European commodities. These resembled spiritually powerful objects which tradition dictated be exchanged through a complicated procedure that denoted social status within tribes.<sup>21</sup> Beads, for example, had long held strong spiritual importance for Iroquoians and were used to decorate wampum belts.<sup>22</sup> Around this time, glass beads appear along with pieces of brass, copper, and iron to replace traditional adornments in weapons used for hunting, wampums, and other spiritual objects. And while these likely entered Iroquoia in very small quantities, these objects clearly held a great level of spiritual importance and practical use to the Iroquois as samples of late 16<sup>th</sup> century

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found in Albert S. Gatschet. "The Massawomekes" from *American Antiquarian* [July 1881] at Archive.org, [http://www.archive.org/stream/massawomekes00gatsrich/massawomekes00gatsrich\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/massawomekes00gatsrich/massawomekes00gatsrich_djvu.txt).

<sup>21</sup> Colden claims in the introduction to his "History of the Five Indian Nations" that "Sachems... are generally poorer than the common people, for they affect to give away and distribute all [their] presents and plunder... as to leave nothing to themselves" (page *xx* – *xxi*).

<sup>22</sup> Special belts woven into elaborate designs that were traditionally made with seashells and used as a means of recording the past or denoting important events (via a complicated system of specific symbols). Elisabeth Tooker, *Lewis H. Morgan on Iroquois material Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 215 – 218.

Seneca villages show at least 20% of the Iroquois were buried with these objects to be sent with them into the afterlife.<sup>23</sup>

Despite Iroquoia's geographic separation from direct contact with the Europeans, the presence of the colonists had from a very early start begun to affect the material culture of Iroquoia. Indeed, many realities for the Iroquois world were beginning to change with the arrival of Europeans. Chief among these changes was the conduct of native warfare. As discussed earlier, the Battle of Lake Champlain and the demonstration of the potential use of the arquebus as a weapon effectively forced an end to the ritualized traditions of native warfare in the northeast. Direct open-field confrontation between large armies equipped with bows and adorned in primitive armour constructed of wood<sup>24</sup> would be no match against the new weapons the Europeans brought with them.

A year after this important battle, Champlain again found himself in conflict against the Iroquois foe. This time, however, the Iroquois had adapted their practices to the lessons learnt from their defeat at Lake Champlain. While still equipped with traditional weapons, the Iroquois soldiers knew to fall to the ground when they heard the sound of gunpowder igniting indicating that an arquebus was being fired in their direction.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, Europeans changed native warfare in more ways than just through the introduction of the arquebus. Traditional arrowheads made of flint were replaced by iron and brass points made available from trade with the Europeans. This not only made the arrow a more sturdy, reliable, and deadly weapon, but also rendered the

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<sup>23</sup> Richter, 52.

<sup>24</sup> A full account of the pre-contact conduct of indigenous warfare is provided with great detail by Samuel de Champlain in *The Works of Samuel de Champlain Volume 2* [1608 – 1612] (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1971), 82 – 101.

<sup>25</sup> H. P. Biggar, *The Publications of the Champlain Society: The Works of Samuel de Champlain Volume II* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 114 – 116.

large wooden shields traditionally used by the region's natives in times of war useless, as the metal-tipped arrows could easily penetrate the bark hides.<sup>26</sup>

Survival and adaptation to this changing style of warfare demanded that the Iroquois immediately establish access to European goods – and the fastest way would be through the trade. However, the Iroquois initially found their access to European markets hindered not only by geography but by their lack of furs, particularly those of the beaver. The Confederacy greatly lacked the fur known as *castor gras*, which was the most desired by European traders. These were furs designated as having already been trimmed and worn by the natives for at least a year, which effectively removed the outer guard hairs and added a glossy-yellow colouration from the accumulation of human sweat, which made the fur more pliable.<sup>27</sup>

The absence of these desirable pelts pushed the Iroquois to either enter into an increasing number of trades with neighbouring nations for such furs or, as was more common, to conduct raids on river flotillas making their way to French, Dutch, or English trade centres.<sup>28</sup> This reaction resulted in an increasing level of conflict and warfare between the Confederacy and its neighbouring nations and saw the development of a new phenomena in which the Iroquois attempted to assert a presence (usually militaristic in nature) in territories they did not inhabit for the sake of securing a middleman position in the increasingly lucrative fur trade. This development, which became known as the '*Beaver Wars*,' resulted in a worsening of relations with the Iroquois and their neighbours and gave considerable validation to the negative image of the Confederacy which the

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<sup>26</sup> Richter, 54.

<sup>27</sup> George T. Hunt, *The Wars of the Iroquois: A Study in Intertribal Trade Relations* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1960), 33.

<sup>28</sup> Adriaen van der Donck, *A Description of the New Netherlands* [1656] (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 110 – 120.

Algonquians and other Iroquoian nations had instilled in the Europeans. However, it should also be noted, as an example of the regional strength of the Iroquois polity, that for a considerable amount of time the Confederacy was quite successful in maintaining a constant and steady presence in a considerably large territory which they did not inhabit.<sup>29</sup>

Warfare during the Beaver War Period not only increased, but began to claim considerably more lives. Initially, the retirement of wooden shields and the introduction of more effective arrows had a far more profound effect on native warfare than did the introduction of firearms. Traditional native warfare resulted in few casualties because the flint-tipped arrowheads could not penetrate the large wooden shields used by native warriors. The retirement of these wooden shields and the introduction of stronger arrows transformed warfare into a far more serious affair. The result was much higher casualty rates which encouraged a dangerous pattern of reciprocating actions of hostility between the Confederacy and neighbouring nations.

The Huron became a particularly important target, and rival, of the Iroquois in this period. Their position north of the Great Lake that now bears their name granted them access to a far larger trade network that was more plentiful in beaver furs. Furthermore, their geographic location also placed them in a perfect position between the Ojibwa and Ottawa Algonquin nations (among others). This location granted them a steady supply of the desired *castor gras* beaver pelts in exchange for their agricultural

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<sup>29</sup> Pages 32 – 37 of George T. Hunt’s work looks at the gradual growth of Iroquois militaristic actions against neighbour nations for the purpose of obtaining furs for trade with Dutch merchants. Richter further mentions in the fourth chapter of “Ordeal of the Longhouse” that the Iroquois had achieved this phantom presence in these slowly expanding territories through the use of fear.

products.<sup>30</sup> Huronia was perfectly placed for the fur trade allowing the Huron to become an imposing rival to the Iroquois. As an agricultural nation, the Huron possessed similar advantages that the Confederacy enjoyed such as a large and well organized population which was made possible by their access to a steady, easily harvested, and abundant food source. Having also emerged from the same Great Mourning War Conflict which had created the League, the Huron had also adopted many of the same defence traits which the Iroquois had adopted (such as the surrounding of villages with palisades).<sup>31</sup>

As the Iroquois increased the number of raids on native flotillas and created a more steady supply of beaver pelts, they began to feel a need to establish direct and permanent access to the fur traders' markets. Otherwise, they would continue to find themselves defeated (or at least equalled) in battle by their former foes. The French were so firmly allied with the Algonquin and Huron peoples of the north that they themselves had become enemies of the Confederacy. Likewise the League's Susquehannock enemies to the south had, early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, relocated from their traditional territory and established a permanent presence closer to the Atlantic coast in order to both block Iroquois access to the English markets in Virginia and gain privileged access to English goods. The only other option was to establish routine trade with the Dutch traders at their forts along the Hudson River in Mahican territory.

The Mahicans, unlike many of their neighbours, enjoyed a relatively good relationship with both the Mohawks and the surrounding Algonquin nations. Mohawks would have to seek permission to cross Mahican territory, as was native custom, but this

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<sup>30</sup> Bruce G. Trigger's comprehensive work *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976) page 318 makes reference to the considerable advantage the Huron possessed in access to *castor gras*, and how this would lead to a fateful worsening of relations between Huronia and Iroquoia.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

request was almost always met with acceptance.<sup>32</sup> As a result, the Mohawks quickly grew to become one of the most prominent trade partners with New Netherlands early in the colony's history. The situation became more complicated around 1623, however. The Dutch stationed at Fort Orange (present day Albany) began to pursue formal trade relations with the Mahican's Algonquin neighbours to the north rather than with the Mohawk, in the hopes that the Algonquins extensive trade networks north of New France at Sault Ste Marie would result in even better access to furs with potentially better prices than the Mohawks demanded. If Dutch trading preferences were to shift from the Iroquois to the Algonquins this would have resulted in the Confederacy being effectively cut off from commerce with the settlers. A temporary truce was quickly established between the Iroquois and their northern Algonquin enemies. This truce provided the Iroquois with the resources to focus on securing a permanent relationship with Dutch markets.<sup>33</sup>

By 1624, the Iroquois had entered into a prolonged conflict with the Mahicans; however, only the Mohawk would contribute warriors, earning this conflict the title of the Mohawk – Mahican War. Little is known of this four-year long conflict but what is certain is that it ultimately resulted in the defeat of the Mahicans, and by 1628 the Mahican territory had been pushed away from the Hudson River and all the way to the Connecticut.<sup>34</sup> The Iroquois had successfully surrounded the colony of New Netherlands with their newly expanded territory. Along with this acquisition, the Mahicans agreed in

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<sup>32</sup> Hunt, 135 – 136.

<sup>33</sup> Richter, 55.

<sup>34</sup> For perhaps the best possible reconstruction of this war with the limited sources which can be drawn upon consult Daniel P. Barr, *Unconquered* (Westport: Praeger, 1971), pages 31 – 36. Barr draws a conclusion supported by this work which implies that this war signifies an important turning point in Iroquois relations. From this point on war becomes an effective tool for the Iroquois in eliminating competition to Iroquoia.

peace talks to include the Mohawks as partners in their wampum trades and pay them a yearly tribute of wampum beads. This agreement meant that Iroquois trade with the Europeans would not have to be divided between ceremonial materials and other items of practical use to the Confederacy.<sup>35</sup>

For their part, the Dutch had stayed out of the conflict, considering it in their best economic interests to remain neutral so as to continue healthy trading with whomever emerged victorious. However, throughout the conflict the Dutch did continue to secretly sell weapons to the Mahicans and encourage their fight against the Iroquois. The traders were, after all, well aware that their best economic interests lay with the Mahicans who would permit the settlers to continue trading with as many different nations as they pleased and did not, like their Iroquoian counterparts, seek an exclusive trading relationship with the Dutch.<sup>36</sup>

The Confederacy had successfully established direct access to European goods. Furthermore, just as the Dutch had anticipated, the Mohawks had monopolized all trade with Fort Orange so that no Algonquin or Abanaki nations to the east or north of New Netherlands could reach the colony (or at least the strategically important Fort Orange as New Amsterdam could still be reached from the south). The only trade that would be conducted at Fort Orange was with the Confederacy. This privileged trade with the Dutch carried yet another benefit for the Iroquois which would once again change the nature of their warfare, and allow them to assert their ever growing prominence in the region. This

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Most of what Barr draws his sources from on the Mohawk – Mahican War are documents pertaining to the secretive selling of arms to the Mahicans and Dutch preference for a Mohawk defeat.

benefit was the trading of firearms, something which the Dutch felt considerably more liberal towards than other Europeans.<sup>37</sup>

By 1643, it was estimated by Jesuit priest Isaac Jogues that the Mohawk alone possessed approximately 300 arquebuses, and Dutch documents from the following year confirm the selling of an additional 400 firearms complete with gun powder and lead to the Mohawks.<sup>38</sup> However, it took time for the Iroquois to develop the full advantage of firearms. A 1643 record of an assault on a Huron party in the St. Lawrence reveals that at this point the main purpose of the arquebus was not to kill but rather to intimidate.<sup>39</sup> But only a few years later in the late 1640s, the Confederacy had gained a palpable reputation of competence which Europeans could surely have never imagined. The large armies associated with traditional warfare again returned, replacing the strategies of small-scale ambush the Iroquois had adopted following the Battle of Lake Champlain. Warriors made use of their new skills of marksmanship to again dominate their old foes the Huron, Erie, Neutrals, and Petun in battle.<sup>40</sup>

Direct access to the Dutch came with a cost however. In the early years of contact, the geographic isolation of the Iroquois had prevented the outbreak of European diseases which had devastated coastal nations closer to European contact. Now that the Mohawk enjoyed routine and direct interaction with the Dutch, the old world plagues that had ravaged Iroquoia's neighbouring nations now made their way into the Confederacy's world. According to New Netherlander records, the Mohawk nation experienced its first

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<sup>37</sup> Van der Donck touches upon the nature of trading between Mohawks and Dutch, particularly alluding to the Mohawk interest in firearms. Pages 99 – 100.

<sup>38</sup> Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 80 – 81.

<sup>39</sup> As witnessed by Father Paul Ragueneau, "An Attack by Iroquois Warriors" in *The Penguin Book of War: Great Military Writings*. ed. by John Keegan (New York: Penguin, 1999), 91 – 98.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel K. Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience" in *American Encounters*. ed. by Peter C. Mancall and James H. Merrell (New York: Routledge, 2007), 427 – 454.

outbreak of smallpox in 1634.<sup>41</sup> This same year saw similar outbreaks throughout the Great Lakes region which decimated the populations not only of the Confederacy, but of the Wendat and Huron nation too.

While traditionally a means of settling individual hostilities between nations, the traditional practice of mourning wars became a practical means of restoring decimated populations. This strategy offered several additional benefits. Firstly, systematic mourning wars would bring in individuals who were already familiar with Iroquoian practices even if they were not part of the Five Nations itself and thus may have been seen as a way to preserve the traditional practices which growing dependence on European goods was slowly erasing.<sup>42</sup> The introduction of foreigners (First Nations born outside Iroquoia) into Iroquoian society would furthermore give the Confederacy greater and more useful knowledge of their rival nations. Lastly, systematic mourning wars could also be used to eliminate many of the Iroquois neighbours who rivalled them in strength and posed a potential threat to their survival.

The ritual of mourning wars was itself gruesome and odd. Captives were brought back to the villages where they were paraded around and taunted before being tethered to a palisade and tortured by their captives. Many Jesuit accounts go into great detail about these horrific experiences which could be as simple as lashings, brandings, and beatings or as cruel as scalping and applying heated sand to open wounds.<sup>43</sup> The ritual was

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<sup>41</sup> Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest: 1492 – 1650* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 206.

<sup>42</sup> Parmenter makes reference to the idea that Mourning Wars could be used as a means of cultural preservation on pages 46 – 47 while the escalation of Mourning War magnitude is touched on by Matthew Dennis in *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois – European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America* (Cooperstown: Cornell University Press, 1993), 132. However Richter, Barr, and several other secondary sources draw similar conclusions.

<sup>43</sup> For more detailed (and gruesome) accounts of these practices consult Vimont's "Of Incursions by the Iroquois" [1643] or Jérôme Lalemant's "How Father Jogues was taken by the Iroquois" [1647]. Both of

merciless and traditionally the family who had been ‘wronged’ was most active in the procedures. After an extended period the village made decisions on which prisoners would be put to death and which would be freed, showered with affection, and introduced to a family as a replacement to whomever had been lost. Remarkably, this process of systematic abuse followed by communal affection was often quite effective and many of these spared prisoners came to accept the Iroquois as their new nation, sometimes even rising to positions of power within the villages.<sup>44</sup>

Such logic was grounded in tradition with the Iroquois, but as was the case with Iroquoian warfare, the tradition was pushed to a level of extremity by the changing reality which contact with Europeans brought to these societies. The exact number of casualties from European - introduced diseases is difficult to construct in Iroquoia at this time due to a lack of documentation. It is unlikely that the Iroquois experienced losses as heavy as that experienced in Huronia and by the Wendat nation, who had lost over a third of their populations by 1634.<sup>45</sup> But by their own accounts, the nation was placed in a dire situation and the possibility of cultural extinction seemed very real. The traditional Iroquoian means of treating illness through sweat lodges would have proven disastrous in treating small pox, which requires the patient to try to regulate his or her body temperature.<sup>46</sup> This experience would have resulted in large scale casualties comparable to the Great Mourning War.

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which can be found in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*. ed. by S.R. Mealing (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990). Pages 57 – 58 for Vimont and 59 – 61 for Lalemant.

<sup>44</sup> Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009), 104 – 105.

<sup>45</sup> Cook, 206.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, the Iroquois inevitably fell into a quagmire of repeating conflicts as besieged nations reciprocated with attacks of their own. Unfortunately, the changed nature of native warfare discussed previously resulted in a greater number of casualties during these mourning wars which in turn demanded greater recourse. Therefore, every attack ultimately inflicted greater damage and an even larger response. This system of escalating violence would ultimately result in the destruction of entire nations as the Iroquois sought to incorporate entire villages into their society.

In July 1648, an Iroquois force of what was estimated to be 1000 men, composed mostly of Mohawk and Seneca warriors, launched a surprise attack on two Huron villages.<sup>47</sup> The Iroquois force was itself well equipped with firearms and did not hesitate to use them in their assault, which placed the Huron at a considerable disadvantage. Since the arrival of the French, Huronia had become a greatly divided community between its converted Christian population and what has been termed by prior historians as its “traditionalist” population. French missionaries had greatly favoured the Christian Huron and would only permit the sale of fire arms to the baptised, unlike the Dutch whom the Iroquois relied on for firearms and who were happy to sell to individuals regardless of their religious convictions.<sup>48</sup> While the Huron, by all accounts, fought valiantly against the Iroquois force, their considerably smaller supply of firearms and lesser capabilities with them proved to be no match against the Iroquois force. The village, complete with its longhouses and crops, was utterly destroyed and burned to the ground. Approximately

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<sup>47</sup> Trigger breaks down a more complete analysis of the destruction of Huronia in two separate sections of *Children of Aataentsic*, of which pages 751 – 766 provide the estimates given in this work.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

700 were killed and an additional 1000 fled to neighbouring villages.<sup>49</sup> The vast majority of the prisoners the Iroquois returned with from the village were women and children, which greatly helped to ease the demographic damages disease had inflicted on Iroquoia.

This assault, which was the extreme but logical result of the intensifying Beaver Wars, marked the beginning of the end for Huronia, highlighting to the Iroquois the fatal weakness of their long-time rival in European trade: fewer firearms and lack of skill with them. More interestingly however, the assault also marks a strange new development in native warfare. The size of the force for example was considerably greater than had ever been seen before and for the first time ever a native battle made heavy use of firearms as a means of engagement.

This massive Iroquoian force returned to Huronia in early March 1649, which was again an unconventional tactic. Traditionally, indigenous warfare came to a stop in the winter seasons and resumed when the snow had melted and spring begun. The early March raid, however, was highly destructive, largely because it was unexpected.<sup>50</sup> The Iroquoian force which had laid waste to Huronia several months earlier had established a winter camp north of Lake Ontario rather than return to their villages, allowing the Iroquois to reach Huronia earlier than would have been possible otherwise.<sup>51</sup>

Targeting the villages of St. Ignace, St. Louis, and St. Marie (all names which had been applied by the Jesuits) the Iroquois launched a major three-day offensive right in the heart of Huronia. Only three Hurons survived the night raid on St. Ignace, and St. Louis

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<sup>49</sup> As this paper is not concerned with the finer details of Huronia's destruction this summary will have to suffice. However, for a greater description of the campaign itself consult Father Ragueneau, "Of the removal of the House of Sainte Marie and of the death of Garnier and Chabanel" [1650] in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*. ed. by S.R. Mealing (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), pages 72 – 77.

<sup>50</sup> Barr, 44.

<sup>51</sup> Trigger, 767 – 781.

was at first easily overrun. However, the Iroquois force appeared to have lost some of its stamina after it failed to capture St. Marie and was eventually forced from St. Louis. Despite these setbacks however, the Iroquois ultimately returned to Iroquoia victorious.<sup>52</sup> An estimated 230 Huron warriors were killed in the attack, in comparison to the Iroquois who only lost 200 during both the March and July raids. To top all of this an additional 400 Hurons were taken prisoner.<sup>53</sup> While the Huron had successfully repelled the Iroquois they had been left so heavily demoralized by the attacks, so fearful of the inevitable return of the Iroquois, and their population so damaged, that the only reasonable solution appeared to be the relocation of the survivors to new areas closer to New France and any protection she may have been capable of offering. In one efficient campaign the Iroquois had successfully damaged and demoralized an entire nation to the point of territorial abandonment, effectively completing the destruction of Huronia.<sup>54</sup>

This campaign invigorated the Iroquois, restored their damaged population, and simultaneously removed the Huron as a rival nation while weakening the French as a presence in the Great Lakes region. All of this had been achieved while sustaining little damage to Iroquoia itself. Realizing the possibility of pushing their rivals from the area and establishing an exclusive access to the region's furs and trade (similar to what had previously been achieved in Mahican territory) the Iroquois set out on a similar operation against the Neutral nation. By the spring of 1651, the Neutral had been destroyed in the same manner as the Huron.<sup>55</sup> Survivors were displaced and often ended up relocating to

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<sup>52</sup> Father Ragueneau, "Of the removal of the House of Sainte Marie and of the death of Garnier and Chabanel" [1650] in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*. ed. by S.R. Mealing (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), pages 72 – 77.

<sup>53</sup> All statistics pertaining to the raid of Huronia are taken from Trigger in *Children of Aataentsic*.

<sup>54</sup> The conclusion which Trigger draws in *Aataentsic*.

<sup>55</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and the Republics in the Great Lakes Region 1650 – 1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1 – 3.

closer proximities to New France. The Iroquois continued to claim the territory as their own. However its geographic distance from Iroquoia made it difficult for them to exert a presence without establishing settlements – something none of the Five Nations seemed inclined to do, perhaps for fear of the difficulty in securing military support should it be needed. The result of this was the gradual encroachment of the Ojibwa into Iroquoia’s newly ‘conquered’ territory.<sup>56</sup>

Meanwhile, this pattern of attack and annihilation was repeated in 1654, but not against the ever strengthening Ojibwa. Rather the Iroquois turned their attention to the much closer nation of the Erie. While their population was similar in size to the Huron, the Erie had more success in holding off the Iroquois force, likely due to a combination of their proximity and knowledge of past offences against the Huron and Neutral nations. Despite this the Erie, after two years of resistance, also succumbed to the Iroquois force. Unlike the Huron and Neutral, whose survivors established new homes around New France, the Erie were entirely assimilated into the Iroquois.<sup>57</sup> With the Huron, Neutral, and Erie nations effectively gone, the Iroquois had depopulated the region north of Iroquoia around the Great Lakes, with Ojibwa and Iroquois forces often engaging in small conflicts, each seeking control of the trade centre at Sault Ste Marie and to establish a presence in the area.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> William W. Warren, *History of the Ojibway People* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984), 144.

<sup>57</sup> Like the Mohawk – Mahican War, there is little documentary evidence to supply an indepth analysis of the Erie – Iroquois War. However, both George T. Hunt and Daniel P. Barr provide adequate insight. See Hunt, 100 – 102, and Barr, 51 – 52.

<sup>58</sup> Ultimately the region was always controlled by the Ojibwa who were simply more willing to establish settlement in the region and could therefore maintain a larger and more stable presence in the area. For the most part the Iroquois routinely referred to the region as theirs, but seldom made a strong enough appearance in the region to uphold this claim in the eyes of other First Nations and indeed the French too. A project of such broad range and limited space as this can not afford to analyse this conflict too greatly

The French Jesuits, meanwhile, suspected these unprecedented, violent actions towards the Iroquois neighbours to be the work of Dutch intrigues<sup>59</sup> and while this belief was incorrect, the role of the Iroquois relationship with the Dutch influenced the politics of the Confederacy heavily. The Dutch had provided the Iroquois with access to new items which in turn had provided a new lifestyle. As a result few of Iroquoia's craftspeople now knew how to make the traditional items which European goods had replaced. However, this relationship with the Dutch had also allowed Iroquoia to establish hegemony in the region. Likewise, as virtually their only trade partners (although not by choice), New Netherlands was itself entirely dependent on the Iroquois for the success of the colony.

This dependence upon the Dutch became essential by the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, as emphasized by the Onondaga in 1678 when they referred to this Iroquois – Dutch partnership as an “ancient brotherhood”<sup>60</sup> (despite the New Netherlands having only existed in the new world for less than 60 years). Trade with these traders from the Low Countries had created not merely diplomatic ties between the two nations, but informal ties had also emerged as the personal relationship between the heads of two trading entities were of traditional importance in the Iroquois.<sup>61</sup> As such, there were times when the Iroquois – Dutch relationship became strained. However the necessity of European goods always prevailed and the relationship always normalized.

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and must instead be content to offer abridged conclusions that, in this case, are derived from Warren's conclusions. See Warren, 146 – 154.

<sup>59</sup> Parmenter, 46.

<sup>60</sup> Richter, 87.

<sup>61</sup> This can be seen throughout the Journal of Harmen Meyndertsz van den Bogaert, particularly in his entry for January 11<sup>th</sup>. *A Journey into Mohawk and Oneida Country: 1634 – 1635* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 19 – 20.

Such was the nature of the Dutch – Iroquois trade relationship. The Iroquois were far from the preferred trading partners of the New Netherlanders, who often made this well known. For example, during the Mahican – Mohawk War, a small band lead by Daniel van Krieckenbeeck set off to join forces with a Mahican war party only to be ambushed by Mohawk warriors and killed. Often, the Dutch highlighted their ignorance of Iroquois tradition, policy, and culture as was demonstrated in the 1634 winter excursion in which, according to the journals of Harmen van den Bogaert, many of the Iroquois found the Dutch to be vile and rude.<sup>62</sup> Despite the many inadequacies that prevailed between the Iroquois and New Netherlands the trade was simply too lucrative for both sides. Iroquois raids always guaranteed a steady supply of high quality furs from the north for the Dutch who in turn guaranteed a constant supply of the highly demanded European goods.

In less than half a century the Iroquois world had changed dramatically. However, the Confederacy had successfully weathered these changes and developed a strong and powerful role in the affairs of the north-eastern woodlands. The relationship with the Dutch as an essential source of goods was central to the Iroquois' continued survival. Inter-tribal warfare had changed forever. Many of the former rivals of the Iroquois such as the Huron and Erie had disappeared, and the lucrative Great Lakes region was now a power vacuum. Western European settlement had been blocked by the presence of an expanded Iroquoia which was simply too powerful a force for the Europeans to break through. In many ways, despite its few disadvantages, the Iroquois – Dutch relationship had made Iroquoia an even more powerful force in the region. Unfortunately, the situation in New Netherlands was somewhat different.

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<sup>62</sup> Richter 89 – 90.

**Chapter 3**  
*The Iroquois and the French*

On August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1664 four ships sailed into the harbour of New Amsterdam under the British flag, demanding the surrender of the colony to England. The British had long desired to take control of the Dutch colony,<sup>63</sup> and had correctly assumed that the increasingly agitated Dutch traders of New Netherlands were unlikely to fend off any attempt at annexation. The Netherlands would briefly recapture the colony again in August 1673 only to quickly lose control of it to the British following the end of the Third Anglo-Dutch War in November 1674.<sup>64</sup> This marked the end of the Dutch presence in North America. Unlike their French and English counterparts, the Dutch population on the continent had struggled to grow, and the colony routinely suffered from financial shortages. Therefore, the colony's capture by England (who by comparison was far more engaged and interested in her colonies' continued development) was a welcome change for the citizens of New Netherlands.

While the Dutch settlers embraced this capture the Iroquois were greatly concerned over its implications. The Dutch had long been the only real access to European goods for the Iroquois who, in less than half a century, had become entirely dependent on the colony for European goods.<sup>65</sup> Logically, it seemed that trading between

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<sup>63</sup> Tensions between Holland and England had been steadily increasing in Europe ever since the English civil war, and from 1652 – 1653 the two countries had been officially engaged in open warfare. Despite this little hostility between the colonies of these two countries was seen in the Americas until the early 1660s, and it is unlikely the Confederacy had much knowledge of this until the capture of New Netherlands.

<sup>64</sup> Dutch anger was fuelled by the constant lack of fortifications, manpower, and trade goods, coupled with the Dutch East India Company's routine failure to meet the settler's demands for military assistance against ever increasing conflicts with neighbouring First Nations. Holland, for its part, saw little to be gained from reclaiming the territory as it continually failed to produce viable profits. For more see Parmenter, 117 – 118.

<sup>65</sup> These goods had come to replace many traditional items, and the traditional knowledge of how to construct such items was slowly being lost. Elisabeth Tooker, *Lewis H. Morgan on Iroquois Material Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 3 – 8.

the Iroquois and English should continue as if nothing had changed, and there were certainly further benefits to forming an alliance with the English as they were also the traditional enemies of New France. The English colonists however, were also the allies of some of the rival Algonquins east of New France and of the Susquehannocks south of Iroquoia, the latter being one of the only remaining native entities vying for regional power with the Iroquois. From these concerns with the English emerged a brief but considerably important political crisis in Iroquoia in which the Confederacy had to choose whether to pursue its new commercial relationship with English or French traders.

Within Iroquoia, a wave of people, mostly women (who traditionally enjoyed an influential role in Iroquois society) and young Iroquois, began pushing the tribes to improve relations with New France. This shift in attitude towards the French is largely due to the considerable number of Huron, Neutral, and Erie natives who had been brought into Iroquoia during the height of the mourning war conflicts from 1649 – 1656.<sup>66</sup> Unlike in Iroquoia, there had been a heavy presence of missionaries in Huronia which had produced a considerable number of baptized natives. As mentioned earlier, these baptised natives had received preferential treatment from the French. As this demographic became an increasingly large portion of the Confederacy's population it began to exert a considerable amount of influence in Iroquoian politics. Unable to ignore the demands of this demographic, the Iroquois found themselves with no option but to pursue a new relationship with New France.<sup>67</sup> In time, these considerable changes in population structure slowly chipped away at the societal cohesion of the Iroquois League and its identity.

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<sup>66</sup> Richter, 106 – 111.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Developing such a relationship wasn't simple, however. New France had long established the salvation of native souls as part of its mission in the new world, in contrast to her Protestant Dutch and English rivals.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, in order to establish better relations with the French, the Iroquois would have to permit the Jesuits to establish missions in Iroquoia. This was something that would have made most Iroquois, born and raised in Iroquoia, uneasy as there had never been any formal introduction to European religion from the Dutch. The only experiences the Iroquois had of the European's strange faith was from Pastor Johannes Megapolensis who became proficient in the Mohawk language and would permit curious Iroquois to wander into his services and ask questions.<sup>69</sup> Beyond this the Iroquois had never shown any interest in Christianity and often treated it as a joke, asking Megapolensis once why Christians sin so frequently as they seem to beg for forgiveness quite often. The Iroquoian word generated for the faith was itself just the same generic term used to refer to Europeans which translated as "metal workers".<sup>70</sup>

Despite this, the newly adopted Christian-Iroquois were able to ensure that invitations were offered to the French to construct missions in Seneca, Onondaga, and Mohawk territory, in the hope that relations between the Confederacy and New France could begin to improve. This decision had the added benefit of luring additional Christian-Hurons who had settled within the territory of New France into joining Iroquoia so that they could be reunited with lost kin. However, this did not prove to be a smooth transition for either the Jesuits or Iroquois. Bands of "traditionalists" harassed the

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<sup>68</sup> Marcel Trudel, *Introduction to New France* (Montréal: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston of Canada, 1968), 256.

<sup>69</sup> Charles E. Corwin, "Efforts of the Dutch-American Colonial pastors for the Conversion of the Indians" in *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* XII (1927), 225 – 246.

<sup>70</sup> Richter, 106.

missionaries and in some cases (particularly among the Onondaga and Mohawk who had smaller Huron populations) forced them to abandon their posts. Despite the influx of converts from the north, anti-Christian sentiment remained strong inside Iroquoia.

This sentiment was further fanned by “traditionalists” from Huronia who had also been taken in by the Iroquois. These people, who had developed a strong dislike for the clerics back in Huronia, told frightening stories of how the priests were “sorcerers” who brought diseases and drained the Huron spiritual leaders of their supernatural power through special ceremonies.<sup>71</sup> Naturally, this developing folklore only strengthened the anti-Christian attitudes of Iroquoian traditionalists and further divided Iroquoian society in new ways. For the first time in its history, the Confederacy found itself becoming socially split. However, these traditionalists appear to have had a limited influence, and what influence they did exert was usually done through acts of bullying towards the clergy. For the time being, they lacked any real influence within Iroquoian politics.

What did not further the French cause was the clergy’s insistence that the Iroquois could not become true Christians until they renounced their ways and accepted European customs instead. Missionaries targeted important aspects of Iroquoian culture such as the practice of divorce, healing rituals, ceremonial feasts, and dream interpretation.<sup>72</sup> These expectations not only further angered the traditionalists but, because they were now banned from some of the most important social elements of Iroquois society, the Christian-Iroquois increasingly found themselves alienated from their own societies and more dependent upon the priests and their missions than the village and their families. Jesuit attempts to remedy this growing isolation, such as their permission to attend certain

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<sup>71</sup> José Brandao, *Your Fyre Shall Burn No More: Iroquois Policy toward New France and its Native Allies to 1701* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) 77 – 78.

<sup>72</sup> Trudel, 256 – 258.

ceremonial feasts proved to be only mediocre solutions at best. In essence, Iroquoia society was split into two distinct communities, but only one retained any real political power.

The Jesuits were ultimately successful in producing many conversions to Christianity from the Iroquois villages, many with considerable influence in the Confederacy's politics. In reality, however, most of these conversions were just political acts which emerged as the Huron adoptees first started to flex their demographic muscles and demand that Jesuit priests be invited into Iroquoia just prior to the fall of New Netherlands. These demands became an opportunity for young Iroquoian political leaders to gain sway among the new Christian population and secure continued support for their position in the community. But the cost of this pandering would threaten the stability of Iroquoia and its ability to function cohesively.

By the early 1670s when French priests claimed they had “won to Jesus Christ a great many of the chief personages.”<sup>73</sup> These included leaders from all five nations of the Confederacy such as Assendassé of the Mohawk and Garakontié of the Onondaga (both of whom were particularly influential within the Confederacy). Garakontié himself became one of the most prominent figures in Iroquoia throughout the 1650s to 1670s, playing a significant role in essentially every treaty made between the Onondaga and New France. These acts quickly earned the chief a reputation as a friend of the French who served as their “protector and sole refuge in a barbarous land”.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Charles Hawley writes extensively on this transformation in his work on Cayuga history. This summation along with its quotes are drawn from his work *Early Chapters of Cayuga History: Jesuit Missions in Goi-o-gouen, 1656 – 1684*, which was first published in 1879. The full book is available online. [http://books.google.ca/books/about/Early\\_chapters\\_of\\_Cayuga\\_History.html?id=rFQOAAAAIAAJ](http://books.google.ca/books/about/Early_chapters_of_Cayuga_History.html?id=rFQOAAAAIAAJ).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

Conversion also became a means of ensuring a separate identity from the Iroquois for the considerably large portion of its demographics which was now made up of abducted foreigners. For the first time ever captives of mourning wars could resist total assimilation without isolating themselves from the community, or risking retaliation from, Iroquoian society. Indeed, many Jesuits who had served in Huronia noted a considerable number of the adoptees who had previously been hostile towards Christianity becoming adamant practitioners of the faith within Iroquoia. In this sense, relations with the French forced a slower rate of assimilation into the Confederacy's society and further encouraged internal rivalries and divisions.

As would be expected from this period of social division, Iroquois fortunes began to wane. In time, so too did the influences of Iroquoia's French-supporters. Disease, which many Iroquois sought to remedy through conversions, once again began to ravage the Confederacy throughout the late 1660s and early 1670s. Unfortunately, they found both their 'faith' and the Jesuits to be powerless to stop the outbreaks. Slowly, more Iroquois began to accept the traditionalist claims that these "black gowns," as they called them, were sorcerers who conjured these plagues and cast them upon Iroquoia. All of this occurred with unfortunate timing as continued skirmishes with Algonquin nations along the east coast and Susquehannocks along Iroquoia's southern border continued. While French-backed leaders like Garakontié tried to use their religious connections to secure divine support in their conflicts, (along with French forces), they routinely failed to help defend the Iroquois in battles.

The population continued to fall at an exponential rate as casualties of failed skirmishes with neighbouring nations grew steadily and European diseases once again

ravaged the Confederacy's communities. By 1662 the population of Iroquoia was half of what it had been in the late 1630s.<sup>75</sup> The Confederacy's became unable to support continued conflicts in the east, south, and increasingly – the west. Naturally, the lands north of the Great Lakes were impossible to control. The Ojibwa, with other Algonquin peoples, continued to operate an impressive fur trade network through Sault Ste. Marie to the north while establishing encampments and settlements throughout former Huron territory – flaunting the Iroquois' claim to the region. But there was little the Confederacy could do to stop this expansion. So long as disease wreaked havoc on the Iroquois population the Ojibwa had to be ignored. So long as the Confederacy didn't challenge the Ojibwa presence north of the Great Lakes, the Ojibwa posed no direct threat to the rest of Iroquoia. All of this had begun to weaken the legitimacy of the Jesuits and the French in the communities and swing support in Iroquoia towards the traditionalists.<sup>76</sup>

As the Christian-Iroquois became an increasingly greater minority in Iroquoia, the Jesuits began encouraging their remaining followers, especially those who commanded influence, to become more assertive in not only their beliefs, but also their politics within their communities. So rather than yield their rights to the majorities' wishes the Christian-Iroquois were instructed to never make compromises with the traditionalists.<sup>77</sup> This turned social instability in Iroquoia into political instability, which greatly threatened the

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<sup>75</sup> George C. Kohn, *Encyclopedia of Plague and Pestilence* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 194.

<sup>76</sup> The Minnesota Historical Society has re-published William W. Warren's *History of the Ojibway People* [1885] (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984) in which an entire chapter is dedicated to the Ojibwa perspective of the wars with the Iroquois to control the region north of the Great Lakes. Because of size restrictions I can not go into great detail about the finer points of the Ojibwa's ability to fend off the Iroquois. But I will add that it is largely due to the continuing conflicts around Iroquoia and the damages which disease does to their population which gives the Ojibwa the upper edge against the Confederacy. For greater detail consult pages 146 – 154.

<sup>77</sup> Richter, 118 – 119.

League. If Iroquoia was to survive, then French influences had to be removed and traditionalists had to regain control of the Confederacy.

Christian leaders were accused of having been turned into Frenchmen by the black gowns. Garakontié himself was said to no longer be a true Iroquois since he had abandoned the customs of Iroquoia. By the late 1670s, it was not uncommon for Christian-Iroquois to have become the targets of societal bullying and various assaults. Christian-Iroquois increasingly became viewed as enemies within their own communities, and very little prevented these assaults from becoming fatal. Iroquoia appeared to be on the verge of breaking into civil conflict.

The Christian-Iroquois response to this growing aggression within Iroquoian society was to leave Iroquoia and establish new settlements in the St. Lawrence River Valley within the limited protection of New France (similar to what some of the survivors of the destruction of Huronia had done several years prior at Wendake). This was a decision which the French themselves believed was the only way in which Christian-Iroquois could protect their faith. These migrants from Iroquoia ultimately settled in various communities established for them outside Montréal, such as Kahnawake. As the Christian-Iroquois left, so too did the French presence in Iroquoia. Relations between the Iroquois and New France slowly cooled, much to the pleasure of the traditionalists, happy to see the black gowns disappear from Iroquoia.

However, this migration of the Christians away from Iroquoia not only settled the political instability of the Confederacy. The population of the Iroquois had once again dramatically shrunk over a short period of time. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that all of the Christian-Iroquois left Iroquoia. Kinship ties have always carried strong

traditional ties in Iroquois society and despite this mass exodus, these ties were often strong enough to encourage many of the converted Iroquois to remain in the region as a politically powerless minority and endure the abuse of their fellow kinsmen. Rather, it would seem that mostly those born outside Iroquoia, along with the more influential members of Iroquoian society who had helped to preserve the relationship with New France for so long, had been the ones to abandon the country. Therefore, while the Christians had been effectively ousted from influence in Iroquoia, many of the society's deeply-rooted divisions remained, having never been properly addressed.

Outside the country were more problems. Beyond Iroquoia, the region north of the Great Lakes had proven both too distant and large a land to be maintained without settlement. The Ojibwa, who had only begun receiving weapons from the French in the early 1640s, had become as expert with their use in conflict as their Iroquois rivals. Having maintained an ancient alliance known as the "Council of Three Fires" with their Ottawa and Potawatomi neighbours, the Ojibwa had not only driven the Iroquois out of the territory north of the Great Lakes, but had also defeated the Sioux just west of the region. Through these conquests, the nations of the Three Fires had expanded their lands around Lakes Superior and Huron and by establishing settlements throughout this territory had proven far more successful in asserting their presence in the region and had achieved the coveted position of middlemen in the fur trade.<sup>78</sup>

Worse still, throughout the early 1670s, Iroquoia continued to struggle with a lack of fur for trade, resulting in poor access to European goods, and it was not uncommon for members of the Confederacy to travel to Kahnawake to see members of their kinship who had left Iroquoia. Sometimes Iroquois went just to visit, sometimes to pick up European

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<sup>78</sup> These wars of the Council of Three Wars are also covered by Warren 146 – 154.

goods, but other times to try and convince these family members to return. These attempts to lure their family back not only failed, but travelers increasingly began to move to these French-associated communities which did not suffer from the same malaise with which Iroquoia was currently plagued.<sup>79</sup> Those who did not relocate to the French communities eventually gave up trying to convince their relatives to return to Iroquoia. These communities became known to the Confederacy as enemies.

It did not take much to renew the Iroquois hatred of the French. Not only were these new French-Iroquois communities continuing to lure away the people of Iroquoia, but in the winter of 1670 – 1671 the French under the company of Simon François Daumont de Saint Lussion returned to the Great Lakes region to reassert the French presence in the area,<sup>80</sup> a monumental blow to Iroquoia. New France, picking up on Iroquoia's growing weakness, began intimidating the Iroquois by sending processions of men into the Great Lakes region directly via the St. Lawrence along the border of the Confederacy's land. In doing so the French hoped to prove to the Cayuga, Seneca, Oneida, and Onondaga nations (with the Mohawk having been neutralized a few years prior with the use of the Carignan-Salières Regiment)<sup>81</sup>, that the French could indeed launch an attack similar to the one they had launched on the Mohawk in 1666 any time they wished. This strategy proved successful. The Iroquois, struggling with far too many internal problems and lacking direct access to European goods, sued for peace with New

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<sup>79</sup> Even in the absence of Europeans, disease continued to ravage Iroquoia largely due to the traditionalist methods of treating illness (via practices such as sweat lodges) This kind of treatment would only have made the illnesses and their outbreaks worse. Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire* (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1984), 129.

<sup>80</sup> See The Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online's article on La Barre. [http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=419](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=419).

<sup>81</sup> Throughout the year 1666 the prestigious Carignan-Salières Regiment of the French military was sent to New France to quell the rambunctious actions of the Mohawk. The regiment proved to be enough to scare the Mohawk into relative submission for a short period of time. A summation of these events can be found in Jack Verney, *The Good Regiment* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991) 108 – 116.

France in 1671, in a ceremony presided over by Garakontié himself (representing French interests, of course).<sup>82</sup>

This peace with New France, as was often the case with such agreements made between the two nations, would not last long. But it was an indication of the poor state into which Iroquoia had fallen. Only a decade after the Dutch were removed from the region, the Confederacy had gone from being a dominant and powerful indigenous polity and arguably one of the single most influential presences in the region to a struggling nation rife with social divisions and lacking in European goods. Worse still, the Iroquois had completely lost control over the region north of the Great Lakes, were still without access to a European market, and were once again fighting with New France. The loss of Dutch trade and the venomous effects of the French influence on their society had proven to be two factors which had fatally destabilized Iroquoia from its position of prominence and influence developed over the half a century. Its final blow would come from the English.

#### **Chapter 4**

##### *The Iroquois and the English*

With the Dutch gone and hostilities towards the French once again renewed the survival of the Confederacy was now solely dependent upon their relationship with the English. Anti-French and anti-Christian elements within Iroquoia had indeed been trying for some time, albeit in vain, to recruit English support in their political struggle against these elements within their society. Much to their dismay however, the English rarely showed any interest in this situation and often refused to offer assistance. Such was the case in 1671 when a traditionalist Mohawk named Canadasse arrived in Albany claiming

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<sup>82</sup> Richter, 130.

that the New French Governor Daniel de Rémy de Courcelle had dispatched a small force to the Hudson, backed by loyal Iroquois.<sup>83</sup> This warning was a lie meant to lure the English into confrontation with the French, and the “force” which Canadasse spoke of was in reality a westward oriented expedition rather than an eastbound invasion. Whether the English were aware of this or not is uncertain, but officials at Albany ultimately seem to have merely ignored the warnings of Canadasse.

Despite these failures, attempts by the Iroquois to both better relations with the English and encourage their support in removing pro-French and Christian-Iroquois elements from Iroquoia remained frequent. These attempts often occurred at settlements along the Hudson River, where prior to 1667 the New Netherlands colony had existed, as this remained the easiest access to the English for the Iroquois. Worth noting in these events is that this contact was often made not by sachems or other peoples of power but rather by young, and often individual elements of Iroquoian society.<sup>84</sup> These individual approaches to the English certainly ran contrary to the Confederacy’s traditional practice of a central, unified authority in the realm of foreign relations. Following the fall of New Netherlands and the ascendancy of Pro-French/Christian-Iroquois within Iroquoia, this rebellious act of young individuals arriving at English settlements and attempting to encourage some form of English intervention increasingly grew more common showcasing the continued breakdown of authority in Iroquoia.

The fortunes of the Iroquois took a turn for the better in the early 1670s, however. After the English regained control of the Hudson from the Dutch in 1674, Edmund

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<sup>83</sup> This account comes from the second chapter of Francis Parkman, *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West* [1869] (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1963).

<sup>84</sup> This is drawn from other accounts and references which Parkman alludes to in comparison with the account of Canadasse.

Andros was made the region's new Governor.<sup>85</sup> Andros proved to be far more favourable to the Iroquois than his predecessors, albeit mostly for practical reasons. The English were facing worsening relations with their native neighbours which was resulting in a mounting potential for conflict, at a time when their colonial rivals, the French, continued to retain strong relations with their native allies. Hostility between the various Algonquin nations of the east (the Wampanoag, Nipmuck, Podunk, Narragansett, and Nashaway to name a few) was steadily growing and would result in Metacom's War the following year in 1675.<sup>86</sup> The English also faced further tensions along their southern borders between other first nations. There remained growing fears over a renewed Mohawk – Mahican conflict (which this time seemed to be swinging in favour of the Mahicans).<sup>87</sup>

Andros saw the cultivation of strong relations with the Iroquois to be the prime solution. Geographically, Iroquoia was perfectly centred between the French and English colonies and within a reasonable striking distance of New France's Algonquin allies and most of the Algonquin nations which threatened war in New England. Furthermore, the Iroquois were already well-established enemies of just about all the nations that threatened the English, and were a perpetual bane to the French. If this was not all fortunate enough, many fragments of the Iroquoian society had already shown themselves to favour to a strong relationship with the English. Andros acted quickly and struck a military alliance with the leadership of the Mohawk in 1675,<sup>88</sup> following the Christian-Iroquois leadership's retreat to the reserves established for them in New France.

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<sup>85</sup> Richter, 135.

<sup>86</sup> Parmenter, 166 – 167.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Jennings, 141.

Beginning in the winter of 1675 – 1676 Mohawks forces laid siege to Metacom’s winter encampment (a strategy remarkably similar to the ones used against the Huron). Iroquois attacks against the New England Algonquins continued throughout Metacom’s War, and was a vital element in the Algonquin defeat. In return, New England offered small support for the Iroquois in their battles against the Mahicans and attempted to negotiate an end to the conflict. Regardless, both conflicts had come to an end by 1680.<sup>89</sup> The defeated Algonquin of New England and the Mahicans were relocated by the English northeast of the Hoosic River further east from the borders of Iroquoia, and put under the ‘joint protection’ of New York and the Iroquois (who began referring to them as their “children,” peoples for whom they had the burden of taking care and being responsible).<sup>90</sup>

It was in the south that the English proved their value to the Iroquois. In 1675 many of the Susquehannock villages, which had proven the most troublesome to the Confederacy during the long-running period of sporadic conflicts which erupted around Iroquoia, were invited by the English to settle in Maryland. Those that arrived were met with a massacre by Virginian colonists. The dispersed survivors left to settle either in Delaware or were forcibly assimilated into the Onondaga and Cayuga nations.<sup>91</sup> Following this act of trickery, it became relatively simple for the Iroquois forces to finally confront and defeat the remaining Susquehannocks, who were uprooted and

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<sup>89</sup> An account of this war is offered in sixth chapter of Alan Axelrod, *Chronicle of the Indian Wars* (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 1952). His theory and perspective sometimes hints at reflecting more outdated and European centric thought processes but it is a worthy analysis to consult regardless as Axelrod frames the Beaver War period of 1638 – 1684 as one continuous action, uninterrupted by shifting allegiances.

<sup>90</sup> Richter, 136.

<sup>91</sup> A full analysis of this operation, including a complete look at the motives for its implementation and the struggles which emerged afterwards can be found in Francis Jennings, “Pennsylvania Indians and the Iroquois” in *Beyond the Covenant Chain*. edited by Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 75 – 92.

forced to return to the Susquehanna Valley where following their disastrous defeat they became known as the Conestoga nation.

Within slightly more than a year, the Confederacy had gone from being a severely weakened polity, rife with civil distress and suffering considerable population losses, to restoring themselves as the strongest indigenous presence in the north-eastern woodlands. From the Atlantic coast to the Great Lakes southern shore, into the northern hinterland and southern Appalachians, the Iroquois were unrivalled in the region. Furthermore, this laid the foundations of the Iroquois relationship with the English known as the “covenant chain”. This association originates with the 1675 treaty the Iroquois made with the English and several other nations with whom the English crown had cultivated formal relationships. This covenant chain with which the English and Iroquois had become entwined would provide the Iroquois with a commercial market where furs were traded at a rate one-third higher than in New France and provide the Confederacy with several native allies.

There were limitations to the covenant chain, however. Chief among them was the constant refusal of the English to provide militia to aid the Iroquois in times of war. This kind of refusal appears to be a common theme in colonial England’s policy in the new world, to always avoid if possible any involvement in native quarrels. However, this policy came at the detriment of the Iroquois who were forced to watch as New France continued to make inroads into the Great Lakes region while the ever-strong Ojibwa forcibly kept the Iroquois out of the land which they still claimed as their own.

Prior to the chain’s formation various concessions of land along Lake Ontario were made to New France by the Iroquois in response to these problems in the north.

However the English refused to assist in an intervention when asked by the Iroquois who were forced to witness the establishment of more French forts and posts. This became particularly worrisome in 1676 when a fort was constructed at Niagara directly along the traditional Seneca territory. From this fort, the French and their indigenous allies were increasingly able to come and go, better securing their access to the furs of the region.<sup>92</sup> Throughout the 1670s, the French constructed more forts not only along the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence region, but also down the Illinois, Prudhomme, and Mississippi Rivers bringing several nations such as the Miami and Illinois into their sphere of influence and strengthening the growing alliance of native nations who, through their relationship with the French, found themselves now to be sworn enemies of the Iroquois.

Andros reaffirmed to the Iroquois that the English (who at this time were at peace with France in Europe) would not engage in conflict with their “friends” in New France and instead tried to encourage the Confederacy to trade with them.<sup>93</sup> The English held a hard line and threatened to sever the Iroquois from the covenant chain should they engage in war with New France. The French colony could rest assured that it was safe from attacks as the Iroquois were unwilling to endanger this relationship with the English. Indeed, while the relationship with the English had reaffirmed both Iroquoia’s position of power and survival, the covenant chain had failed to live up to the Iroquois’ expectations, based on their previous relationship with the Dutch. The English, like the French, had proved to be more interested in the origins of the furs offered for trade and uses of the weapons exchanged at forts. While not nearly as meddling as the French, the English continued to show interest in the domestic and political affairs of Iroquoia, much to the

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<sup>92</sup> Richter, 138 – 139.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

dismay of the Iroquois themselves.<sup>94</sup> Regardless of their dismay, the Iroquois continued to tolerate this behaviour because they knew that there was no alternative to the English anymore.

With this in mind, the Iroquois began to refer to Governor Andros as “Corlaer,” a title drawn from a former Dutch Governor. In kind, Andros initiated a series of regular meetings with the leadership of the Iroquois which became known as “brightenings of the chain,” which itself was derived from a traditional Iroquois ritual.<sup>95</sup> These meetings were a place to exchange gifts and pass histories. It was during such meetings that Albany became the official location for treaty signing for the covenant chain and where the title of “Corlaer” was passed down to future governors of New York.<sup>96</sup> Over time these new governors would fail to appreciate the significance of these brightenings but for the time being they remained integral components of the Iroquois – English relationship.

It was during this time that the problems of what historian Richard White labelled the “middle ground” came to prominence. The Confederacy’s series of conquests against rival Iroquois nations throughout the Great Lakes region, coupled with various successful skirmishes along the country’s southern border, had resulted in a power vacuum that forced countless refugees to seek security further west throughout the Ohio Valley. New indigenous powers had either emerged as a result of this refugee crisis or had entered the territory to take advantage of it. The Illinois, Miami, Shawnee, Wyandots, Ottawa, Fox, Sioux, and Ojibwa had all become considerable problems to the Iroquois, who now found it a great struggle to defend their western border. While the Iroquois, with limited military power, attempted to mediate and oversee the trade in this region, their capacities

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<sup>94</sup> Richter, 140 – 141.

<sup>95</sup> Richard Haan again provides a brief outline of this traditional practice’s origins, 41 – 50.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

proved to be embarrassingly limited and were visibly waning, resulting in an increase in warfare as these growing nations saw the opportunity to strike at Iroquoia in its weakened state.<sup>97</sup>

The warfare which engulfed the western border of Iroquoia resembled the great mourning wars with the Confederacy's rival Iroquoian nations from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. What little record of these western engagements exists indicates a series of considerable victories for the Iroquois along their south-western border. In 1676 for example the first European record of this conflict emerges from one of the last remaining Jesuits in Iroquoia, Jean de Lamberville, who reported the arrival of 50 captives to the Onondaga nation.<sup>98</sup> Four years later Lamberville records that 300 Miami and Illinois prisoners were taken in yet another raid. Again, this time in 1682, he claims the Iroquois captured 700 and killed another 600 in the largest raid recorded in their western wars.

The exact accuracy of these records is questionable since as one of the last remaining French priests in hostile territory, Lamberville would likely have good cause to inflate numbers to further sully the Iroquois image to the French. However, these records nevertheless clearly indicate a substantial level of violence occurring along the south-western frontier. The north remained no different as the Iroquois continued to struggle against Ojibwa forces which still routinely showed themselves more capable than the Iroquois in battle. It was estimated that the Confederacy lost as many as 700 warriors in a

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<sup>97</sup> This can be a difficult process to explain and what exists above is a solid attempt at simplifying the complicated development of native nations into formidable rivals to the Iroquois. Certainly alone, none of these middle ground powers could stand against the force of a revived Iroquoia – but the constant threat of so many powers proved difficult for the Iroquois to handle, especially when they adopted the practice of assimilating foreign refugees, which as it had been for the Iroquois, became an important component to the speedy growth of national populations and, more importantly, war parties. For a complete and more in-depth analysis on the rise of the middle ground consult the first chapter of Richard White, *The Middle Ground* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

single battle with the Fox and Ojibwa.<sup>99</sup> Similar to how the Iroquois faced difficulties traveling further north to engage the Ojibwa in conflict, the Iroquois also began to face difficulties in traveling deeper into the Ohio Valley to engage their western enemies in conflict. They were stretched over a territory that was now twice the size that Iroquoia was less than one hundred years prior – but the Iroquois had engaged in very little settlement beyond its historic core.

War was not contained to the west, either. Following the formation of the covenant chain and the adoption of a large number of Susquehannocks into the Confederacy's society, the Iroquois began launching wars on southern indigenous nations such as the Conoy, Piscataways, and Catawbias. These were relatively small nations, who showed little aggression towards the Iroquois and whose land possessed few resources which would be advantageous to the Iroquois. Naturally, the English found the reasoning for these attacks to be odd. While exact cause was never truly ascertained, it can be assumed, as one Virginian insightfully stated, that the Iroquois “used to always march northward and still would, but for the incitement of the Susquehannocks”.<sup>100</sup> It would appear that from their new positions within Iroquoia the adopted Susquehannocks had incited the Confederacy to engage in the old rivalries of the Susquehannock nation in the pursuit of old grudges.

This is of course not the sole reasoning behind the Confederacy's decision to launch these series of attacks in the south. But we have by this point seen the extraordinarily level of influence which a sudden jump in population, led by an influx of

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<sup>99</sup> White, 56 – 57.

<sup>100</sup> James H. Merrell, “Their Very Bones Shall Fight: The Catawba-Iroquois Wars” in *Beyond the Covenant Chain* ed. by Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 115 – 134.

foreigners, can have on Iroquois society. As mentioned earlier the population of Iroquoia had suffered greatly during the defection of Christian-Iroquois to French lands, leaving Iroquoian society greatly destabilized. Renewed waves of European disease, which swept the country following the collapse of New Netherlands, had only worsened this situation. The Iroquois were desperate to end this crisis. They employed the same method which had been used several decades before when they had been faced with similar problems: mourning wars. Unfortunately, wars with tribes in the east were not permitted as they were now part of the covenant chain. New France (and by extension her native allies) also enjoyed a period of peace with the English and was also off limits. Renewing Susquehannock hostilities and attempting to assert control over a region that surely was proving to be uncontrollable became the rallying call for these battles.

The same results which occurred several decades before emerged yet again. The majority of Iroquoia was again becoming dominated by foreigners. Society was again showing signs of destabilization. However, this time it was not religious indifference threatening Iroquoian society, but rather a new societal division that had emerged. Previously, mourning wars had primarily been fought with fellow Iroquoian peoples, such as the Huron, Neutral and Erie, peoples who were familiar with Iroquoian languages and customs not to mention the concept of the mourning war itself. While the Susquehannocks may have been Iroquoian, many of the southern and western nations who were providing most of the prisoners, such as the Illinois and Ottawa, were not. These situations were about to find themselves worsened with the return of war between the French and English. When this happened, the Iroquois would finally find their society

completely destabilized between civil and cultural factions, and their forces too stretched to function properly as a cohesive indigenous polity.

These hostilities first began to occur with the ascension of Joseph-Antoine Le Febvre de La Barre as the Governor of New France. La Barre ironically faced a similar problem as the Iroquois did in the west as their own control over the region was beginning to unravel with resources and man-power stretched too thin.<sup>101</sup> La Barre was convinced the Iroquois had plans to attack New France and her outposts in the region to dispel the French presence in the west. By 1682 La Barre had concluded that Iroquois actions were the reasons for New France's difficulties in the region. A planned native attack on New France was building and unavoidable. Furthermore, La Barre exacerbated French Anglophobia by asserting that "for four years past the English have left nothing undone to induce the Iroquois to declare war against us...by means of the great number of presents which they have made them, or by the low terms at which they have given them goods, especially guns, powder, and lead".<sup>102</sup> There could certainly be no question that tensions were again beginning to simmer between the English and French fur traders.

While by 1684 La Barre's suspicions had been proven false, the English had wasted no time in their preparations for war. Using the great level of influence the covenant chain granted them in Iroquoia, the English put an end to what little trading with New France still existed, encouraging the complete severing of all diplomatic ties with the colony. The English further demanded that all wars with Iroquoia's neighbours to the west be ended. However Iroquois leaders, while gleefully agreeing to the emerging

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<sup>101</sup> White, 31 – 32.

<sup>102</sup> See The Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online's article on La Barre for more on the reasonings behind his actions. [http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=419](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=419).

form of hostility towards the French, refused to end the western wars, nor was it likely these wars could be ended.<sup>103</sup>

It was during this time of growing tensions that a new faction of Iroquoian society began to develop, embodied in the influential Onondaga leader Otreouti. These ‘neutralists’ began expressing concern for the effects caused by the tight ties to European traders on Iroquoian society. This growing faction expressed a need for the Confederacy to pursue a path of neutrality and avoid involvement in European rivalries. But like the Traditionalists before them, they would have to wait longer before obtaining any true power and influence in Iroquoia. Until then, the Iroquois continued to be led by the English towards confrontation with the French.

War was avoided in the late 1680s when the Iroquois, now confident of English support, stared down La Barre’s threats of war. New French forces were scattered, sickly, and ill prepared for war and so New France sued for what would be a temporary peace with the Iroquois who, with their own forces still spread thin across their ever-growing lands and wars, were in no hurry to launch yet another new engagement. Unfortunately this only proved to be more damaging for the Iroquois. French and English crowns came under a treaty of friendship in 1686 which allowed the new Governor of New France, Jacques-René de Brisay de Denonville, and his improved forces to invade the Seneca in ‘defence’ of New France’s western allies.<sup>104</sup>

The invasion proved disastrous for Iroquoia. Denonville moved easily through the Seneca making his way into Onondaga territory and capturing several influential Iroquois

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Parmenter, 174 – 175.

leaders and holding off several counter attacks.<sup>105</sup> What proved to be more damaging however, was that because of their treaty of friendship with France, the English refused to supply the Iroquois with militia assistance, contrary to what the Confederacy had been led to believe about the nature of the covenant chain. The simple reality of the situation was that the English made for poor allies to the Iroquois. The British had entered into the covenant chain under the belief that they could use it to neutralize the Iroquois as a military force. Instead the Iroquois proved to be highly independent, refusing to let English policy dictate which wars were ended and which wars were fought. What would prove to be most damaging to Iroquoia was the firm stance England appeared to hold in avoiding any and all conflicts if possible. Naturally, it was these early events which served to greatly increase the neutralists cause and start a wave of Anglophobia among Iroquoia.

Denonville's forces had devastated the western end of the Confederacy. Four villages had been laid to waste and the heraldry of the French monarch raised over the remains. Several prominent Iroquois had been kidnapped, food caches pillaged and destroyed. Even the graveyards of the Iroquois had been ransacked and graves dug up and looted for anything of value.<sup>106</sup> It should surely have been a victory for the neutralist faction in Iroquoia had it not left the Confederacy's population united and hungry for retribution against New France. They were not prepared to wait for English backing.

By 1688, only a year after Denonville's notorious incursion, it was reported that 900 warriors of the Onondaga, Cayuga, and Oneida nation alone were prepared for war with New France. The plan was to begin the war against the French at the place where

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<sup>105</sup> Parmenter, 174 – 175.

<sup>106</sup> Richter, 158 – 159.

Denonville's attack had begun, Fort Frontenac (modern-day Kingston). However, prior to its start an additional several hundred warriors traveled to Iroquoia's western frontier where the beaver hunt was combined with vicious and deadly raids against New France's strongest allies in the region.<sup>107</sup> The Iroquois won quick victories at Frontenac, Niagara, and several other important forts in the Great Lakes region, marking some of their only victories against the Ojibwa, and pushed the French presence out of the area. By the summer the Iroquois had successfully struck New France in the heart of Canada killing 24 and capturing an estimated 70 – 90 prisoners at Lachine opposite the island of Montréal.<sup>108</sup> These sporadic raids continued, leaving New France in a state of fear as the Iroquois continued to revel in their remarkable and somewhat unexpected series of successful campaigns fuelled by rage.

During this time, New York, now a part of the collective colony of New England, refused to offer the Iroquois any military support, stating that England was on peaceful terms with France. They condemned the Iroquois actions against the colony. However, back in Europe the reign of the English King James II was coming to an end as William of Orange was beginning his invasion of Britain. By June 1689, knowledge of James's fall from power became known to the Iroquois. England, under its new leadership, was fully prepared to join the war against New France in the new world as it currently found itself at war with the colony's parent back in the old world.<sup>109</sup>

While the circumstances behind England's change of heart were likely too confusing and difficult for the Iroquois to appreciate it couldn't have come at a better time for the pro-English faction of Iroquoian society who throughout the war had been

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<sup>107</sup> Daniel P. Barr provides a full analysis of these battles from pages 88 – 93 of *Unconquered*.

<sup>108</sup> Parmenter, 174 – 175.

<sup>109</sup> Barr, 88 – 93.

losing influence to the neutralists. Finally, England had agreed to live up to its commitments as part of the covenant chain, effectively halting the growing popularity of neutralist factions throughout Iroquoia. Unfortunately, the English would prove not to be the military force the Iroquois had led themselves to believe they were.

The early years of this conflict (known as King William's War in the new world and the War of the Grand Alliance in the Old World) were met with several victories for the Iroquois and English. But fortunes turned for the Iroquois in the 1690s. English offensives against New France largely failed and despite their early victories the French managed to recapture their lost territory for the duration of the war.<sup>110</sup> This forced the English colonies to become far less offensively minded and more defensive, something the Iroquois had certainly not expected. From 1693 – 1696 French forces and her native allies laid siege to multiple villages in all five of the Confederacy's nations destroying food supplies and effectively limiting the Iroquois capabilities. Throughout all of this English forces had been too preoccupied with defensive tasks of their own in New York to come to the assistance of the Confederacy.<sup>111</sup>

This failure of the English to live up to Iroquois expectations in battle was to be the breaking point for Iroquois – English relations. Peace was eventually declared between France and England in 1697 but the Iroquois refused to accept this and continued fighting, quite unsuccessfully, for another four years until the Confederacy was finally forced to admit defeat. The failure of England as an ally had been the final blow to what had been a briefly resurgent wave of support for strong relations between the Iroquois and English throughout Iroquoia. From this embarrassment came the ascension

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<sup>110</sup> Jennings, 195.

<sup>111</sup> Jennings, 195.

of the Iroquois neutralists to power in Iroquoian society, and with them, a change in Iroquois policy that would forever alter their role in the region.

King William's War had left the Iroquois country in a shattered and defeated state. Their forces were spread too thin to be functional across a territory too large for them to control. Iroquoia had been defeated externally while cultural and political factions continued to internally divide and tear the society apart. Despite this the Iroquois had successfully staved off the New French forces and her allies for a further four years after the war's conclusion, which was a remarkable feat. But reality had finally settled in and the neutralist leaders of the Five Nations had been proven right. The Confederacy was no longer capable of sustaining so many wars and exerting itself militarily. The Iroquois furthermore had to accept that they no longer had a reliable ally in any of the European settlers. Peace between the Iroquois and their neighbours would be the only option for the continued survival of Iroquoia and so, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, 1701, delegates from the Iroquois, French, and 40 other indigenous nations who had been engaged in sporadic conflict with Iroquoia, met in Montréal to sign what became known as the "Great Peace of Montréal":<sup>112</sup> a humiliating but desperately needed peace that would ensure the security of Iroquoia's borders albeit with unwanted provisions such as the return of Jesuits to their country.

Ultimately, 1609 – 1701 forms a period of great importance to the Iroquois Confederacy. It defines the transformation of Iroquoia into one of the most established, feared, and powerful indigenous polities in all the new world, then, into a weakened and slowly deteriorating nation forced to sue for peace to ensure its survival against weaker

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<sup>112</sup> A full copy of this treaty can be found in Gilles Havard, *The Great Peace of Montréal: French – Native Diplomacy in the Seventeenth Century* (Montréal: Montréal – Queen's University Press, 2001), 210 – 216.

European and Native forces. This transformation was not quick and the Iroquois were not defeated merely through battle. Rather it was the nature of their relationships with Europeans, the dependency developed by the Dutch, social destabilizations left by the French, and failures of support from the English which encouraged and allowed Iroquoia to expand into unsustainable territory and uncontrollable conditions. These would be the very conditions that would ultimately force the Iroquois to bow to European forces, and allow the colonies to begin a period of rapid expansion, that would be largely unchecked by native forces for some time. One can only be left with the conclusion then that the destruction of Iroquois prominence in the region is deeply rooted in the nature of their relationships with their European neighbours, and the effects these relationships had on their society. The Iroquois first learned to use these relationships to their advantage, only to watch them become their downfall.

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