

Technologies of Resistance:

Handsome Lake and Seneca Responses to Land Alienation and Quaker Missions

Gregory Williams

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Adviser: Coll Thrush

INTRODUCTION

Central to many recent attempts to craft a new historical narrative of North American colonialism is the idea of “revitalization movements.” This category attempts to solve two problems. First, it provides a mechanism by which to explain the continued survival of distinct indigenous groups within the context of colonization. Second, it attempts to create a relevant place within the historiography for indigenous religious movements. The histories of revitalization movements tend to focus on individuals. John Slocum, founder of the Indian Shaker Church, one of the largest indigenous religious organizations in existence on the west coast, is a prominent example in BC. Others include Tenskwatawa of the Shawnee, Wovoka, founder of the Ghost Dance Movement, and Neolin of the Delaware.

There are some commonalities to all of these figures. All of them lived and taught shortly after the advent of settler-state control over their territories in one form or another. All of them personally experienced the traumas associated with colonialism that came in various forms including, but not limited to, military defeat, loss of land, aggressive missionization by white Christians, the denigration of indigenous cultures and, often, alcoholism or other forms of addiction. All of them began their ministry with visionary experiences through which they claimed to both explain and provide a solution to the immense problems facing their communities. All of them aroused some combination of suspicion and curiosity among white settlers. In some cases, such as Tenskwatawa's settlement at Tippicanoe and Wovoka's ghost dance, the movements they began were suppressed violently. Others, such as Neolin and John Slocum, were observed with curiosity, derided or dismissed.¹

It is now common for historians to assert that these figures played a central role in the “death and resurrection” of their peoples. This theory is compelling for a number of reasons, including those

¹ See Alfred Cave, *Prophets of the Great Spirit: Native American Revitalization Movements in Eastern North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006)

described above. The history of revitalization movements has been a way for both indigenous and settler historians to re-write the history of post-settlement colonial interactions in a way that emphasizes the survival and agency of indigenous people and communities, expressed within their own epistemological frameworks. Yet there are also some serious problems with this theory. For one thing, it attempts to distill the efforts and ideas of a whole community into the actions of a single individual, making it bear a suspicious resemblance to a “great man” theory of indigenous history. This means that it comes with all the problems of great man histories, not least of which is that every example of a revitalization figure in the historical canon is male.

Yet another problem is that this theory simultaneously reduces the activities of these individuals down to the realm of “religion” and yet simultaneously does not take their religious ideas seriously. Historians tend to define revitalization figures as primarily spiritual/cultural in their innovations. They point to the creative blend of “traditional religion” with innovations like monotheism drawn from Christianity. In this they ignore the very material, real-world aspects of the movements that these individuals founded, many of which formed the very core of their teachings. Tippicanoe was the largest indigenous settlement in the mid-west during Tenskwatawa's day and its very existence was considered a serious threat to white attempts to settle the area. Wolvoka's ghost dance was perceived by white settlers of his day as so threatening that it provoked one of the largest massacres of indigenous people of the entire nineteenth century by the US Army in the “battle” of Wounded Knee. If we are to take these individuals seriously as historical subjects, we must be willing to decenter our own dichotomy between “politics” and “religion,” recognizing that it is drawn more from imposed categories of settler-colonial culture than from the language and expressions of our subjects.

Yet, even as “revitalization histories” limit their subjects to a safely spiritualized realm of

“religious” history, they also do not take the particular religious ideas of these same individuals seriously. Anthony Wallace's text, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* looks at one such revitalization figure through the lens of psychoanalytic dream analysis. The visions in question are described in the tone of a therapist writing a case history of a particularly traumatized and deluded patient. The words “repression” and “neurosis” are common in the book. Not once are the visions addressed as if they made sense to the visionary and his audience.²

THE VISIONS OF HANDSOME LAKE

It is with Wallace's subject – the Seneca teacher and religious leader Handsome Lake – that this Thesis begins its attempt to provide a new way of doing revitalization history. His preaching came at a time when his people, the Seneca, were at the leading edge of a shock wave of Euro-American invasion and settlement of indigenous lands that followed the secession of the thirteen colonies and the formation of the United States. In 1783, Britain ceded all Indian Lands west of the Appalachians to the United States. Between then and 1800, the year of Handsome Lake's first vision, the Six Nations Confederacy (or Iroquois) which included the Seneca was reduced, through aggressively pursued treaties and territorial sales to land speculators, to a few reservations in Western New York. Prior to the war, the Six Nations' internationally recognized boundaries had included hundreds of square miles of territory across what would become parts of Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and Ontario.³

This massive loss of territory was accompanied by material impoverishment, which many contemporary observers linked with rampant alcoholism in Six Nations communities. The territorial invasion of white settlement was also accompanied by a spiritual invasion by white missionaries.

² “Dreams and the Wishes of the Soul” in Anthony Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Random House Publishing), 1970.

³ Matthew Denis, *Seneca Possessed: Indians, Witchcraft and Power in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 39.

Presbyterians, Baptists and, later, Quakers all attempted to engage in battle for Indian souls. In some areas they were more successful than others. Presbyterian missionary Samuel Kirkland had made huge progress in converting the Oneida by the turn of the nineteenth century. Other groups, including the Seneca, still refused to receive missionaries at this point, though they did allow Quaker representatives to operate schools and model farms on their territories.⁴

It was in this context of territorial and spiritual invasion of Seneca lands by white settlers that Handsome Lake received his visions. During the summer of 1799, during his convalescence from a deadly illness said to have been brought on by excessive drinking, he received a series of visits from four messengers of the Great Spirit. In the first vision, the Messengers guaranteed that he would recover. Over the next few months, in further visions, they inspired him to preach a new moral code to the Seneca, called “Gaiwio” or “Good Word.” In the most dramatic of these visions, Handsome Lake went on a “great Sky Journey” in which he saw the various fates that awaited righteous and wicked persons in the afterlife. As a whole, the Gaiwio was essentially a new rule of life for the Seneca which dealt with everything from ritual practice, to marriage, to labor patterns, to land title to the prohibition of alcohol. After his death, Handsome Lake's code was remembered by his family and friends and, by the 1840s, it was being recited every year on reservations across Seneca territory. That practice of recitation continues to this day as part of the Green Corn Ceremony held by Seneca communities every autumn.⁵

HANDSOME LAKE AS A HISTORICAL SUBJECT

The Gaiwio was made famous among historians by Anthony Wallace, writing over a hundred and fifty years after the first of Handsome Lake's visions. While the Gaiwio had featured prominently in the

⁴ See Karim M Tiro, “We Wish To Do You Good: The Quaker Mission to the Oneida Nation, 1790-1840” in *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Fall, 2006)

⁵ Denis, 60-70

work of anthropologists such as Henry Lewis Morgan and Ely and Arthur Parker, Wallace's work marked its entry into the historical cannon. Wallace's text, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, became the classic volume on revitalization movements. All future histories done on such movements for the next several decades were based on this work.

As the paradigmatic revitalization history, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* brought with it all of the problems mentioned above. Insofar as Wallace credited Handsome Lake with the survival of the Seneca beyond the period of colonization his text represents a giant leap forward in emphasizing the importance of indigenous spirituality as an historical subject and an expression of resistance to colonialism. But he did so by concerning himself primarily with the individual and psychological aspects of the Gaiwii. As mentioned above, Wallace's text often reads like a therapist's case report and his analysis of Handsome Lake's visions is done under the framework of "dream analysis."

Wallace pays little attention to Handsome Lake as a political figure. Nor, in spite of hundreds of pages devoted to the eighteenth century history of the Six Nations in general and the Seneca in particular, does he successfully place the Gaiwii within its context. Handsome Lake is described as condemning such universal sins as alcoholism, spousal abuse and gambling, making him seem like every other nineteenth century reformer. Little attention is paid to the fact that he also condemned the sale of land, prescribed collective labor, took repeated pot shots both at missionaries and at settler-colonial states. It is important to note that, insofar as he does not pay adequate attention to Handsome Lake's politics, Wallace also pigeonholes and misinterprets his religion as well, since the two were, for all intents and purposes, the same thing.

Even the seemingly universal aspects of Handsome Lake's teaching need to be reexamined within his particular context. Wallace mentions that he condemned drinking but not that he linked alcohol

consumption to the loss of territory and the division of the Six Nations Confederacy during the Revolutionary War. Wallace speaks of Handsome Lake's teachings on marriage without bearing in mind that he was speaking to a society where matrilineal, matrilocal and multi-family households were the norm. Thus his statement that Handsome Lake upheld stable, faithful marriages makes the Gaiwiiio sound relatively conservative and uncontroversial whereas, as shall be demonstrated in chapter Two, this was a revolutionary departure from traditional Seneca family structures.

TECHNOLOGIES OF RESISTANCE

In short, Wallace commits the two classical sins of revitalization history: he isolates religion from politics and then refuses to take even the religious ideas he examines seriously. The time has come for a new kind of revitalization history that will act as a corrective to these tendencies. Indeed, the time has come to problematize the concept of revitalization itself, since it presumes a “dead period” starkly separating the pre-colonial past of indigenous communities from their present status as integral parts of a “diverse” and “multicultural” society. While the myth of the vanishing Indian, which served so long to erase the persistence of indigenous communities and justify the theft of their lands may now be outdated, the idea of revitalization serves a similar function. Instead of arguing for a permanent death of indigenous communities, it posits a temporary one which still fulfills the same role of providing a safe distance between contemporary political realities and the colonial encounters with the past. Without this separation, there would be nothing to differentiate contemporary Canada and the United States from their colonial origins and this would call their legitimacy entirely into question.

Instead of putting revitalization figures at the crux of death and resurrection of their peoples, perhaps we might do better by positioning them within a continuum of resistance. Indigenous cultures and communities never “died” and therefore did not need to be brought back to life. Rather, they were

met with a new set of challenges which they successfully faced, allowing them to continue to survive and resist into the present. A history of revitalization would, in this model, be replaced by a history of resistance.

This Thesis is an exercise in doing “resistance history.” Instead of limiting an examination of Handsome Lake to the realm of “religious studies,” I want to do my study at the intersection of religion, politics and economics. Handsome Lake was most certainly a religious figure. He believed (and for the purposes of this Thesis I want to assume that he was right) that he was called by the Great Spirit to present a new rule of life to his people. Yet that rule of life - embodied in his Cod - cannot be divorced from the material considerations of land, sovereignty and the contestation of race. His teachings provided a framework that allowed his followers to explain just how it was that the rising problems of material poverty, alcohol addiction and social unrest stemmed from the alienation of their lands and the denial of their sovereignty by the United States, as well as the denigration of their culture by its missionaries and counseled strategies with which to respond to these issues.

In doing this kind of “resistance history,” I am drawing principally on the work of three historians for inspiration: Richard White, Susan Neylan and Nancy Shoemaker. White's idea of a “middle ground” between indigenous communities and settlers, Neylan's new way of doing mission history and Shoemaker's conception of spiritual technology all form underlying ideas to my project, even though I rarely quote any of them in the body of the piece.

Richard White's 1991 book, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* is now considered a foundational text within the historiography of North American colonialism. White's major contribution was the idea that colonization was not a simple two-sided process of absolute conquest between settlers and indigenous communities. Rather, he posited a

zone of negotiation and creative misunderstanding that allowed both parties to contribute to the creation of new political realities, in spite of a marked imbalance of power in their interactions.

Susan Neylan's 2003 book, *The Heavens are Changing: Nineteenth Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* applies a similar idea to the specific realm of missionization. Importantly for our purposes, Neylan's work challenges the idea that conversion automatically meant assimilation. To do so, she uses the case of the Tsimshian, who, she argues, turned Christianity from a tool of colonization into a tool for the preservation of their own culture. Grave stones were adapted to serve the function of totem poles and Church buildings were decorated with clan and lineage symbols.

Nancy Shoemaker argues the same thing about the function of Catholicism for the eighteenth century Mohawk community of Kahnawake in her 1995 article, "Kateri Tekakwitha's Tortured Path to Sainthood." She attempts to counter histories of missions that "presume a linear, assimilationist model of change and seem to come from a Western narrative tradition that depicts people as one thing, and after a crisis of some sort, they become another thing." Her argument centers on the idea that religious ideas, just like other articles brought by colonizers, are tools and, as such, they can do different things depending on the intentions of those who wield them. "The Jesuits preached patriarchy," she argues, but they also

brought to the Iroquois a toolkit of symbols, stories, and rituals that portrayed women as powerful or that gave women access to power. Just as native people transformed Europeans' material toolkit of guns, blankets, and glass beads to suit their own needs, Iroquois women and men may have sometimes adopted, sometimes rejected, but continually worked to transform the spiritual and symbolic toolkit of Christianity to meet the needs of the moment.⁶

Shoemaker's idea of religion as a "toolkit" is the inspiration for the title of this piece. Instead of treating religion as a monolithic form that is completely abstracted from the every-day concerns of historical actors, I choose to view it as a "technology" (a complex of toolkits) that can be designed and deployed

⁶ Nancy Shoemaker, "Kateri Tekakwitha's Tortured Path to Sainthood" in Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 52.

with a myriad of different intentions and results. Instead of looking at the new religious movements of nineteenth century indigenous communities as “technologies of revitalization,” then, which remake indigenous societies completely and bring them out of their “dead period” into the modern world, I wish to examine them as “technologies of resistance,” frameworks that aided the continued survival and perseverance of indigenous communities under the pressure of colonial administrations that sought nothing more or less than their annihilation.

QUAKER MISSIONS AND THE MYTH OF LIBERALIZED COLONIALISM

White and Neylan's frameworks are most helpful when examining one of the most important facets of Handsome Lake's ministry for historians – the presence of Quaker missionaries. Anthony Wallace portrays the Quakers and Handsome Lake as being essentially partners in an effort to “reform” the Seneca. Indeed, this assumption is understandable, given the differences between the Quakers and other missionaries. Unlike the Baptists and Presbyterians, the Quakers only set up missions in communities that solicited them. Moreover – and quite uniquely for their day – they did not attempt to convert indigenous populations to Christianity. There were also, as we shall see, many points of agreement between Handsome Lake and the Quakers. Both, for example, were deeply concerned about the rise in alcohol addiction among the Seneca. Moreover, as we shall see in Chapter two, Handsome Lake borrowed significantly from the Quakers in promoting male-led single-family households based on lifelong marriages. The merits of this borrowing, especially in the case of gender relations, are debatable. This being said, historians are almost unanimous in their assertion that it did occur.

At the same time it is not to be forgotten that the Quakers were deeply implicated in the colonial system that was founded upon the dispossession of the Seneca and the degradation of their culture, even if the Quakers themselves did not participate in this activity. Their program was highly assimilationist,

so much so that it was vigorously supported by the US government. As we shall see, the Quakers frowned upon many economic practices that were central to Seneca identity, including hunting, collective labor and land ownership and even some religious rituals.

We need to write history that recognizes both of these sides of Quaker missions. We must on the one hand break down the myth of Quaker missions as liberalized colonialism and recognize that, in the most fundamental goals of their enterprise, the Friends were not significantly different from other missionaries among indigenous communities, even if they were less aggressive in their methods. At the same time, we must also recognize that the ethic selective borrowing and adaptation that characterized the approach of Handsome Lake and other Seneca towards the Quakers does not make these individuals accomplices in colonialism. As Neylan and White both point out, it is extremely common for missions to be intended as a means of assimilation but turned on their head by indigenous communities who use aspects of Christianity or other imported ideas to help maintain their independence.

A NOTE ABOUT METHODOLOGY

Part of the reason for Wallace and others' assumption that Handsome Lake shared the Quakers' agenda in its entirety is their sole and uncritical reliance on the records kept by the Friends themselves, which constitute some of the only documentary accounts of the events of Handsome Lake's early ministry in existence. Two documents stand at the heart of virtually every history of Handsome Lake ever written. One is Halliday Jackson's "Journal of a Visit Paid to the Seneca Indians," based on diary entries from the time of the mission and published a few years later.⁷ The other is his more extensive piece, *The Civilization of the Indians*, published as a book in 1830 as a compilation of records from Jackson and

⁷ Anthony Wallace, ed., "Halliday Jackson's Journal to the Seneca Indians, 1798 to 1800" in *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April 1952), 117-147.

other missionaries to the Seneca and other nations.⁸ Indeed, the section of *Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* dealing with the Quaker mission reads more or less like a summary of Jackson's texts.

This project will, like others before it, rely heavily on Quaker mission records. But, unlike others, I will attempt to read these records “against the grain” i.e. with the assumption that they are written with a particular perspective in mind and that an accurate history must focus on how this informs them in an effort to uncover the actions and motivations of those for whom the authors did not or could not have been expected to speak. In an example that will come up in the second chapter, Jackson at one point notes that Seneca women, who had been encouraged to start engaging in domestic activities, especially that of cleaning house, were not allowing the Quakers inside their dwellings until they had cleaned them. While Jackson interprets this as a vindication of the Friends' attempts and evidence that the Seneca women were starting to believe in the domestic ideal, I find the idea of such a rapid turnabout in cultural norms unlikely in a society that had valued women for their roles as cultivators of the soil for generations. Thus, while Wallace and others interpret this passage as evidence of the Quakers' success, I choose to read the Seneca women's activities as a form of resistance, keeping the prying eyes of the Friendly missionaries out of their homes except at the most convenient times.

Moreover, I also choose to rely heavily on the Gaiwiiio itself, not only as a source of data about Handsome Lake's teaching, but also as a legitimate historical source. For example, as I shall note in the first chapter, Arthur Parker's version of the text, recorded in the early twentieth century from Seneca oral tradition, contains a different account of the relationship between hunting, trading and alcohol consumption than the Quaker records. While the Quakers claimed that, in the spring of 1799, a hunting and trading expedition to Pittsburgh resulted in the introduction of alcohol into the Seneca village where

⁸ Halliday Jackson, *Civilization of the Indian Natives* (Philadelphia: Marcus TC Gould; New York: Isaac T Hooper, 1830)

they were residing, the Gaiwiiio records that this party never reached Pittsburgh but was stopped a short way down the Allegheny river by a group of white traders, and that it was from them that they acquired the whiskey. While this may seem like a trivial difference, the Quakers used this incident in much of their polemics against hunting and trading and in favor of the transition of male labor towards agricultural production. That the Gaiwiiio counters this story is, in this light, a crucial point.

Moreover, this project, unlike others, will use multiple versions of the Gaiwiiio text to confirm the conclusions that it draws. One of them is Arthur Parker's version, which is the one classically used by historians and anthropologists.⁹ The other is Joseph Bruchac's version, set forth in 1977.¹⁰ There are important differences between the two. While Parker was writing as an anthropologist, Bruchac's version of the text is rendered as poetry and is therefore closer to the tone of the actual recitation of the Gaiwiiio, which still occurs every year on Six Nations reservations throughout western New York.

Both my choice to read Jackson against the grain and my use of both Parker and Bruchac as historical sources is meant as a way to bring as many Seneca voices as possible into the account of an event that has mostly been told in the academy from the perspective of those white settlers who were present – the Quaker missionaries. In an attempt to bring these voices to light for my readers, I often make use of full speeches from Seneca leaders and complete units of text from the Gaiwiiio. I also reproduce as much text from Jackson as necessary when dealing with accounts of Seneca activities. This is especially necessary in the second chapter, which discusses the regendering of Seneca labor. None of the Friends' records contain the transcript to even a single speech by a woman. Yet they do contain observations of women's actions, which we must interpret with a critical eye to discover the actual nature of Seneca women's social and political stances.

⁹ Arthur Parker, *The Code of Handsome Lake, the Seneca Prophet* (Albany: New York State Museum Bulletin, 1913)

¹⁰ Joseph Bruchac, ed., *The Good Message of Handsome Lake* (Greensboro: Unicorn Press, 1979)

All three kinds of text – speeches, accounts of Handsome Lake's visions and accounts of the actions of Seneca women – appear as block quotes in the text of this project. It is my request that the reader pay attention to these, as they are inserted not out of hermeneutical laziness but rather as a way of correcting the historical injustice of marginalizing Seneca voices. It is also for this same reason that, where possible, I record the orthographic transcriptions of Seneca words for concepts that might be rendered in English. I invite the reader to allow these words and phrases to be tools for their reimagination of the Seneca world that we are working to portray. Large block quotes and frequent orthographic transcriptions may make this project slightly more time-consuming to read, but I believe that this is a price worth paying when we consider the politics of leaving these things out.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finally, before setting forth my first Chapter, I wish to acknowledge all of the people who have helped me to complete this thesis, as well as the location from which it was written. My adviser, Coll Thrush, and the chair of the Honors program, Paige Raibmon, have both been absolutely essential guides to me in this work. My fellow students, particularly Arran Walshe, who shares my specialization in the history of religious movements and their relationship with political economy, have been my sounding boards, my editors, my support group and my drinking buddies in the Pit Pub through this whole process. I also owe profound thanks to all of the students and friends who were not in the honors program who volunteered to look at my writing anyway, simply because they supported the work that I am doing.

Most importantly, I want to acknowledge the territory where I completed this work. This project forms part of the graduation requirements for the Honors History program at the University of British Columbia, which sits on the unceded and occupied land of the Musqueam nation. It is important to remember that all of the work that we do in the academy takes place in a context of ongoing land

alienation and colonization and that, if our work is not deliberately made relevant to the dismantlement of these systems, it will inevitably serve to reinforce them. It is relatively common knowledge that the establishment of UBC was authorized by the provincial government, in part, as a means to dispossess the Musqueam community located on what became the University Endowment lands. It is interesting to note that, just as I was completing this Thesis, which focuses on the role of spirituality in the politics of land, members of the Musqueam nation were blockading the entrance to a construction site in Marpole where a developer was seeking to construct condos on the site of a burial ground that had been in use by the Musqueam and their ancestors for over 4,000 years. At a time when the history of dispossession, dislocation and colonialism remains profoundly relevant to contemporary politics, I can only hope that my work will somehow contribute to a new kind of North American history writing, one which serves to document the survival and resistance of indigenous people and validate the contemporary claims that communities are making in the interests of justice and decolonization.

I. Industry, Sobriety and Civilization? The Materiality of Addiction at Jenuchshadago

*ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father,
We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
We have offended against thy holy laws,
We have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
And we have done those things which we ought not to have done;
And there is no health in us.
But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders.
Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults.
Restore thou them that are penitent;
According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord.
And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.*

– The Canadian Book of Common Prayer

Those of us who are heirs to what might uncritically be called “the western tradition” have, as part of that inheritance, a very strange view of addiction. The passage quoted above, taken from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer¹ is a typical example of the conventional wisdom regarding addiction (and social ills generally) that has come out of the English Reformation. The ideal of the English Reformation, depicted here, is that of a “Godly, Righteous and Sober” life. Addiction, is, for inheritors of this tradition, a *religious* problem, an *individual* problem and a *moral* problem. This was the view of addiction carried by Euro-American settlers to North America and remains prevalent in settler societies to this day, being manifested in criminal codes, which punish drug use as an individual crime on par with theft or assault and in innumerable examples in popular media, not least of which is the continuing use of the above-cited prayer of confession by many “traditional” Anglican Churches.

¹ Anglican Church of Canada, *The Book of Common Prayer and the Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church according to the use of the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1957), 5.

This view of addiction has also deeply informed colonial encounters between European settlers and North American indigenous people. The relationship between the Quakers and the Allegheny Seneca community that began with Halliday Jackson, Henry Simons and Joel Swayne's 1798 mission to the New York reservation is a telling and important example. Cornplanter, the leader of the Seneca community at Jenuchshadago, had originally requested the presence of Quaker missionaries because “the Seneca nation see that the great spirit intends they should not continue to live by hunting,” and he had hoped that they would introduce European agricultural technologies into the community.² From the beginning, however, Euro-American discourses about addiction and sobriety were central to the relationship that developed on the Allegheny River.

Historians have traditionally viewed the Seneca religious leader Handsome Lake – whose teachings emerged during the Quaker mission – as a partner with the Friends in promoting “sobriety and industry” among the Seneca. In this chapter, I will argue that this perspective ignores important aspects of the Gaiwiiio and Handsome Lake's teaching on addiction. While the Quakers viewed addiction as a moralistic and individualistic phenomenon that was the cause of Seneca poverty, Handsome Lake taught that addiction was fundamentally linked to colonization and the theft of Seneca lands. While Handsome Lake promoted sobriety, his view of addiction was based on ideas about land and society that were antithetical to those of the Quakers and, as a result, he often found himself in conflict with them. These conflicts preceded Handsome Lake's initial visions and were endemic in the Seneca-Quaker encounter, a political context that cannot be ignored when we interpret Handsome Lake as a religious agent.

ENCOUNTER AT JENUCHSHADAGO

When Jackson, Simmons and Swayne first arrived at Jenuchshadago, several members of the Quaker

² Jackson, Halliday, *Civilization of the Indian Natives* (Philadelphia: Marcus TC Gould, 1830), 10.

committee “for the gradual civilization and improvement of the Indian natives” introduced their mission to the community. In an opening address to the Seneca council, Jackson later reported that the Friends stated their intention “to improve the condition of the Indian natives, and to teach them the way of good and honest white people” and “to instruct them in the cultivation of their land, in the raising and managing of cattle, and also to example them in a life of sobriety and industry.”³

The links between “sobriety and industry” and “civilization” in the Quakers' thinking around their mission to the Seneca were also made evident a few days later, before Jackson, Swayne and Simmons' escort (members of the Quaker committee for the “gradual civilization of the Indian native”) left. In another address to the Allegheny Seneca community, the members of the committee “strongly recommended [them] to Industry” and at the same time, “reminded [them] of the unreasonableness of their present practice of letting their women work all day in the fields and woods...while they themselves were spending their time in idleness, amusing themselves with bows and arrows and other useless practices.” In this, the Quakers equated “industry” with male agricultural labor, denying the economic, social or moral value of any other kind of work. They also linked this view to their emphasis on sobriety. Jackson reports that the Seneca present at this council “were also particularly expostulated with on various subjects relating to their civil and moral conduct, and especially in regard to their excessive use of strong drink, to which the Friends in many instances had been eye witnesses.”⁴

Here, as in their opening remarks to the council, the Quakers openly displayed a very particular attitude towards addiction. They viewed alcoholism as a matter of “civil and moral conduct” which was fundamentally linked with the Seneca's lack of “industry.” In other words, the (male) members of the community were lazy because they were always drinking and this laziness was defined by their “amusing

³ *Ibid*, 30.

⁴ *Ibid*, 32.

themselves with bows and arrows” instead of engaging in agriculture. Given that Euro-American agricultural practices were the object of the Friends' visit to the Seneca, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, in these two opening speeches to the people at Jenuchshadago, the Quakers made clear a sentiment that Sobriety and “Civilization” went hand in hand.

Our story thus far is relatively uncontested among historians of the Seneca. The moralistic and individualistic patterns in western thinking about addiction have been well documented and we need not belabor the point here. But the nature of the encounter between the Seneca and the Quakers at Jenuchshadago is more complicated. The historiographical literature is dominated by that I will term the “consensus view.” This notion is dominant in the writings of Anthony FC Wallace, the principle historian to write about the Seneca, the Quakers and the life and teachings of Seneca prophet Handsome Lake. In much of his writing, Wallace operates on the assumption that the Quakers, the Seneca leadership (particularly Cornplanter) and Handsome Lake all had the same agenda: to combine western methods of agricultural production with a strong emphasis on abstinence from alcohol to address the social ills that the Seneca were experiencing in the decades following the secession of the American colonies from the British Empire. In one of his annotations of Halliday Jackson's “Journal to the Seneca Indians,” Wallace writes that

With this concluding installment, we see the Friends' mission become firmly established, and the new Seneca religion, promulgated by Handsome Lake, emerge as one aspect of the spiritual renaissance which the Quakers had hoped to usher into being. Although the Friends had not expected to be midwives to the birth of a new non-Christian religion, Jackson's narrative makes it plain that they regarded Handsome Lake's messages and recommendations as being worthy of their support.⁵

But are we really to believe this story? Even Wallace acknowledges that there was a certain amount of conflict over the Quakers' agenda of “industry and sobriety,” although, as we shall see, he does much to

⁵ Anthony Wallace, ed., “Halliday Jackson's Journal to the Seneca Indians, 1798-1800 Part II” in *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (July, 1952), 325.

depoliticize this contention. He does acknowledge that the Quaker's initial introduction of their mission was met with trepidation by some Seneca. These, however, he claims were objecting because of their love of alcohol rather than because of any cultural or political issue that they might have taken with Jackson, Swayne or Simmons. He states that

The Quakers responded to these reluctant excuses with the firm statement of two rational principles: first that it was “unreasonable” (i.e. inefficient) to “suffer their women to work all day...whilst the men and boys were at the same time playing at their bows and arrows”; and second that the Good Spirit had endowed the Seneca with faculties and opportunities equal to those of their white brethren.⁶

As we have already seen above, this second speech by the Quakers to the council at Jenuchshadago constituted a strong reinforcement of Euro-American ideas about the moral and individual qualities of addiction. For Wallace to characterize the Seneca responses as mere “excuses” for their continued drinking and to characterize the Quakers as “firm” and “rational” in their response betrays the patronizing attitude that he is bringing to the historical record. One therefore has to ask, what were really the factors at play in this interaction between the Seneca and the Quakers? Was there something more than temptation to insobriety behind the reluctance of some members of the Jenuchshadago community to accept the “aid” of the Quakers?

In between the two opening speeches made by the Quakers to the Jenuchshadago council, Cornplanter made a response that has been passed down to us via Halliday Jackson's written record. Cornplanter is said to have made the following remarks in response to the Friends:

Brothers, the Quakers, listen now to what I am going to say to you. You know, brothers, the red people are poor they are not like the white people. The Great Spirit has made them of another language, and that it is very hard for us to understand one another, as we have no good interpreter. Brothers, we take great pains to settle the proposals you made to us but we differ in opinion and must take great pains to have everything complete. Brothers, we suppose the reasons you came here was to help poor Indians in some way or another, and you wish the chiefs to tell their warriors not to go on so bad as they have done, and you wish us to take up work like the white people. Now brothers some of our sober men will take up work & do as you say, & if they do well then your young men will stay longer, but others

6 Anthony Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Random House, 1970), 226.

will not mind what you say. Brothers, we can't say a word against you, it is the best way to call Quakers. Brothers, you never wished our lands, you never wished any part of our lands, therefore we are determined to try to learn your ways & these young men may stay here two years to try, by that time we shall know whether Morris will leave us any land & whether he will pay us our money; for last summer we sold our land & we don't know whether we shall get what we reserved, or whether we shall get our money; but by that time we shall know & then if they like it & we like it your young men may stay longer. Brothers, if your young men stay here we want them to learn our children to read & write. Brothers, two of you are going home again, if they hear anything about our Land or our Money they must write to these young men here & they must tell us, if we are like to be cheated. Brothers, this is all I got to say at present.⁷

While it seems that there are at least some agreements between Cornplanter and the Quakers evident here (the Friends will stay for a term of two years, they will teach some Seneca children to read and write etc), there is also evidence of more tension than Wallace lets on, especially as to the nature of the Friends' mission in Jenuchshadago. As in his initial message to the Friends at Philadelphia, Cornplanter indicates that his primary request is that the Friends teach Euro-American agriculture to the Seneca, not that they start an Alcoholics Anonymous group. Unlike the Quakers, Cornplanter also sees the travails of the Seneca as being caused primarily by the loss of their land, not by the bad choices of individual Seneca to turn to “strong drink.” He is deeply concerned with the role of [Robert] Morris, the land speculator who bought much of the Seneca nation's territory at the Treaty of Big Tree in 1797 and was, by this time, bankrupt. The land Morris purchased had been bought in foreclosure by the Holland Land company with no guarantee to the Seneca that they would be paid or that the initial boundaries of the sale would be respected.

While Cornplanter held in common with the Quakers a view that the Seneca ought to adopt some techniques of Euro-American style farming, he seems to have thought that defending the Seneca against the theft of their land was a higher priority than exhorting them on their moral conduct. He also seems to have taken more seriously than the Quakers the possibility of a diverse set of responses from members of the Jenuchshadago community. His statement that “we take great pains to settle the proposals you made

⁷ Jackson, Halliday, *The Civilization of the Indian Natives* (Philadelphia and New York: Marcus TC Gould and Isaac T Hopper, 1830), 30-31.

to us but we differ in opinion and must take great pains to have everything complete” seems to indicate that, while Cornplanter was sympathetic to some (though not all) of the Friends' proposals, he also was committed to “due process” among the Seneca and had to take seriously the opposition of some people within the community. Unlike the Quakers, who seemed to view agriculture and sobriety as a panacea for the Seneca's plight, Cornplanter's view was more complex and informed by the diverse political situation within the Seneca community. He did not have the luxury, as Wallace later on would, and as the Quakers seem to have had, of simply dismissing any and all opposition to “acculturation” as an “excuse” for continued indolence and insobriety to be met with “reasonable” exhortation.

THE “CRUEL SPRING”

Perhaps the greatest piece of evidence of the inadequacy of the “consensus view” is how long it took for the Quakers to make any headway at all in promoting “civilization” among the Seneca. After their initial encounter, Cornplanter and the Quakers agreed to a kind of experiment, in which the Friends would be given a plot of land just north of Jenuchshadago where they would farm as a demonstration of the efficacy of their practices.⁸ This approach had the added advantage of allowing individual Seneca to pick and choose which techniques to adopt and which to reject, temporarily or permanently. The result was, as Cornplanter predicted, a diversity of responses rather than total acceptance or total rejection.

For example, it appears that the use of carpentry tools which the Quakers brought with them to lend out to the Seneca was more popular than the adoption of the plow for farming. Jackson reports that “a number of the Indians also borrowed carpenter's tools, to enable them to build better houses, and also some farming utensils, with a view of using them.”⁹ Jackson also reported that the Seneca men were far

⁸ Halliday Jackson, “Journal to the Seneca Indians,” 129.

⁹ Jackson, *Civilization of the Indian Natives*, 33.

more willing to engage in splitting rails and fencing in land than in actually cultivating it.¹⁰ Indeed, most of the Seneca who were interested in the Friends' farming techniques were women. The meeting at which the model farm approach was decided upon was well attended by the women of the community and, once the farm had been set up, “great numbers of [Seneca] came flocking about Friends, especially the women, who appeared kind and respectful, frequently supplying them with venison, fish, strawberries and other delicacies as their country afforded.”¹¹ While this may seem like a supportive gesture, there are several overtones of resistance that can be heard through the historical record. For one thing, the fact that it was the women, not the men, who were the primary messengers of Seneca interest in the Friends' farming techniques must be considered in the context of a Quaker mission one of whose stated aims was to wipe out female agricultural labor. Second, the gifts that the women brought were “venison, fish, strawberries and other delicacies as their country afforded.” All of the three foods listed are the products of non-agricultural labor. The fact that the Friends picked up on their status as “delicacies” could indicate a double meaning. On the one hand, the gift of delicacies can be seen as a gesture of welcome. On the other, it can also be read as a demonstration of the “reasonableness” of female agriculture and male hunting – something that the Friends had denied in a public speech only days earlier. Seen in this light, the actions of these Seneca women may be seen as a kind of social burlesque, a comedic unveiling of imposed social norms that functions to remove their power. In this case, the performance lampooned the Quakers' ideas both about economy and about gender – a pattern that we shall observe both in this chapter and the next.

The Seneca also appeared determined to maintain their annual calendar of hunting and trade in spite of its interference with the Friends' promotion of male-dominated agricultural labor with the plow.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 35.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 33.

During the spring of 1799, even as the Quakers believed that “a spirit of industry seemed to exhibit itself among some of the Indians,” a large party of Seneca still took their annual trip to Pittsburgh to trade skins. Upon their return, according to Jackson, they brought several kegs of whiskey “although Friends cautioned them against it, previous to their going away” and, when it was introduced into the village, “many of them were for a considerable time intoxicated, so that little could be done in promoting their improvement while the liquor lasted.”¹²

As in their initial encounter with the Seneca, we can see in Jackson's remarks the extent to which, in the minds of the Quakers, sobriety was intimately linked to “civilization.” The “unreasonable” aspects of Seneca economic practice were both a cause of their insobriety (the Friends believed that hunting in late winter and trading pelts at Pittsburgh in the early spring was the cause of alcohol consumption) and a result from it “since “little could be done in promoting their improvement while the liquor lasted”). As with their condemnation of “playing with bows and arrows,” the Quakers' view of the Seneca's annual pattern of hunting and trade was one which condemned and denigrated indigenous practices by linking them with drunkenness and holding up a “godly, righteous and sober life” as an ideal that could only be reached by adopting the Euro-American economic model in its totality.

For a time, and to a limited extent, it appears that this discursive strategy was successful. In a council meeting a few days after these events, which Wallace and other historians, uncritically and in concurrence with the Quakers have dubbed “the cruel spring,” Jackson reports that the Seneca largely accepted the Friends' “remonstrations against such conduct” to an unprecedented extent.

The Indians appeared seriously attentive in this council, being convicted in their minds of the truth of what had been declared to them, and in a few days after, they met in council again, and informed Friends that they had seriously considered the subjects proposed to them, and that their chiefs had come to the conclusion not to permit, for the future, any of their people to bring liquor into their villages to sell to one another; that they had appointed two young chiefs to watch over the rest; and to endeavor to promote good order among them – and they desired Friends to be

¹² *Ibid*, 35.

easy in their minds respecting them, for they were determined to take their advice and try to do better...now they were determined to quit those bad practices, and to assist their women in the labors of the field.¹³

If we are to believe Jackson, Quakers, appear to have been successful in pointing to the events of the “cruel spring” that the problems of alcohol abuse that the Jenuchshadago was experiencing were caused by the economic practices of hunting and fur trading that the men of the community engaged in. The “take home message” from these events was, for the council as well as the Quakers, not only the regulation of alcohol in the village but also the participation of Seneca men in the “labors of the field” instead of “playing at bows and arrows.” During the summer of 1799, Jackson reports that, while they did not use the plow or draft animals, the men of the community were actively involved in agricultural work, with the result that the production of corn dramatically increased. While it is doubtful that Jackson's explanation of events can be taken at face value (there are any number of reasons that could stand behind an increased corn crop and most of the Seneca male involvement in agriculture was in splitting rails and clearing fields, two tasks that had been their traditional purview anyway), at the very least, he had reason to believe that Quaker ideas were beginning to be more accepted in the Seneca community at Jenuchshadago. What those reasons are we cannot know with any certainty, but, to an extent, it doesn't really matter what they were. What is clear is that the Quakers had used the cruel spring as an occasion to blame alcoholism among the Seneca on a male economy of hunting and trading and, at they very least, they believed that this strategy was working.

It is important to note that, in the version of these events found in the Gaiwiio, it is not hunting that causes the men to come back to Jenuchshadago drunk with rum. Rather, midway through their expedition, the men come to a white village where they are convinced to trade those skins that they have and return to the village. It is trade with the whites, not the practice of hunting economics that brings

¹³ *Ibid*, 36.

about the events of the Cruel Spring.¹⁴ Given the desire of the Quakers to use these events to convince the Seneca to turn from hunting towards farming, it is reasonable to interpret this account of the events of 1799 as a riposte to that argument.

Thus we can observe a pattern in the records of the Quakers' first year or so of dealing with the Seneca at Allegheny. The Friends came on very strongly, advocating a complete economic transformation from a complex and gendered mix of hunting, farming and trading to a uniform system of male-dominated, European style agriculture. This switch, which may be said to define Quaker ideas about the "civilization of the Indian natives," was to be both the cause and result of sobriety among the Seneca. Thus, instances of drunkenness, like the Cruel Spring, were used to justify this sort of economic transformation. Moreover, the "consensus" view does not seem to hold up under scrutiny, as the Friends clearly encountered resistance to their proposed economic innovations.

This being said, it is also important to stress that a "conflict view" would not be appropriate either. It is not the case that the Quakers and the Seneca were arrayed in neat lines against one another. The Quakers were present at Jenuchshadago at Cornplanter's invitation and there is no evidence of a sustained effort to get them to leave. Moreover, it is clear that Seneca responses to the Quakers were diverse. Cornplanter referred to this diversity in his opening address to the Quaker missionaries, stressing the need for due process in dealing with these differences. The diversity of response is also evident in the range of adaptations that Jackson reports observing among the Seneca. Some adopted carpentry tools. Others started enclosing land. Some adopted the plow but refused to accept it as a male implement. On some occasions there seems to have been a greater level of adaptation than others, but at no time did the Seneca completely convert to a neatly ordered Euro-American style farming community. This situation was fluid

14 Arthur Parker, *The Code of Handsome Lake, the Seneca Prophet* (Albany: New York State Museum Bulletin, 1913), 21.

and characterized by shifting agreements and a complex negotiation of just what was going on.

THE VISIONS OF HANDSOME LAKE

It was in this context, then, that the Gaiwiiio, with all its implications for the problem of alcohol abuse, was revealed to Handsome Lake. Shortly after the “cruel spring,” three messengers appeared to him in a relatively short vision, telling him that “you shall live to see...berries grow ripe this summer.”¹⁵ He had been extremely ill and, according to both Jackson's account and the Gaiwiiio, he was close to death and, indeed, appeared to be dead during his visions. The first vision did not contain much instruction except that “the Creator is not pleased to see your people getting drunk and doing evil.”¹⁶ The theme of sobriety was to be one of the strongest in the visions of Handsome Lake and would never be absent from them.

The second vision, revealed a few days later, contained significantly more detail. This is the most well-recorded of Handsome Lake's visions, having been passed down through oral tradition in the Gaiwiiio and, at the time, having been written down by Joel Swayne, one of the Quaker missionaries. The vision took the form of a “sky journey” - a walk along the “heavenly road” during which Handsome Lake was guided by a forth messenger, dressed in blue and carrying a bow and arrow.¹⁷ During this vision, Handsome Lake saw his son, Cornplanter's daughter and a general outline of the afterlife. Of particular detail was a vision of the “house of the punisher” which included ethical counsel for the Seneca and descriptions of just what the (often very fitting) consequences were for “doing evil.”¹⁸

The theme of sobriety was extremely strong in this vision, but so were other theme, such as a

15 Joseph Bruchac, ed., *The Good Message of Handsome Lake* (Greensboro: Unicorn Press, 1979), 10.

16 *Ibid*, 10.

17 Anthony Wallace, ed., “Halliday Jackson's Journal to the Seneca Indians, 1798-1800 Part II,” in *Pennsylvania History* Vol. 19, No. 3 (July 1952), 342.

18 *Ibid*, 342.

suspicion of Euro-American settlers and, as we shall see, a strong emphasis on economic relations. Particularly telling was Handsome Lake's visions of a figure the Quakers thought roughly equivalent to the Devil.

The guide told me it was very often the case that people would take too much strong drink – it was the Great Spirit that made it to use, but he did not make it to hurt people and Indians would not keep from injuring themselves greatly by it, and if they still continued to get drunk, hurt themselves and abuse others the need not expect to come to that happy place – He told me to look round toward the River which I did and saw many canoes loaded with kegs of Whiskey and also saw an Ugly person going about among them making all the mischief he could among the Indians which the Guide told me was the Devil.¹⁹

The guide went on to tell him that the Seneca “must not drink Whisky for that belonged to White people and was not made for Indians.”²⁰ Yet while Sobriety is definitely a theme in these visions, it was integral to a broader critique of the social and economic dynamics of colonialism. It would be difficult to imagine the Quakers promoting temperance among the Seneca by claiming that the Devil was a white merchant!

It is also no coincidence that Handsome Lake was among the party that went down to Pittsburgh to sell furs during the “cruel spring” of 1799 or that his initial visions came when the Quaker perspective on addiction and agriculture was ascendent. Although Wallace claims that the Quakers “regarded Handsome Lake's messages as being worthy of support,” Jackson would later write extremely critically of Handsome Lake, particularly surrounding his views on economics.

Although Cannedin [Handsome Lake] had advised them to quit drinking whiskey, he was otherwise attempting to propagate notions very much inimical to the concern in which Friends were engaged, by recommending them to follow their old customs, and not allow their children to read and write; that they might farm a little, and build houses, but must not sell anything they raised on their land, but give it away to one another and especially to their old people; and in short, enjoy all things in common.²¹

If there was still any doubt as to the inadequacy of the “consensus view” to explain the interactions

19 *Ibid*, 343.

20 *Ibid*, 343.

21 Jackson, *Civilization of the Indian Natives*, 43.

between the Quakers and the Seneca, this passage does away with it. Handsome Lake and the Quakers may well have agreed on the harmful effects of “strong drink” on the community at Jenuchshadago. But they disagreed on just what that community ought to look like. As we have seen already by examining the discourse of “civilization,” it was this agenda of transformation, not the mere fact of drunkenness, that formed the heart of the Quaker agenda. Thus the points of consensus, though they existed, were at the margins rather than the center of this Seneca-Quaker relationship.

Moreover, it is evident from the text of the Gaiwiiio that Handsome Lake's teachings on alcohol were inseparable from his teachings on land, agriculture and trade. If the grand trio for the Quakers was sobriety, industry and civilization, for Handsome Lake it might be said that it was sobriety, land retention and mixed economics. Moreover, Handsome Lake appears to have been just as conscious that he was resisting Euro-American economic patterns as the Quakers were. An example can be seen in the following passage from Joseph Bruchac's translation of the Gaiwiiio:

*It is the month
when snow leaves the fields.
My people return
from trading furs,
canoes awash with rum.
It leaves them colder
than that winter
when Sullivan, the Town Destroyer,
marched through our hearts
burning even the places
of those who took the Americans' part.*

*I watch my people
through blurred eyes.
More have died this season
from the fevers of rum
than fell on the field of Oriskany
where the British put us in the forward lines.*

*I close my eyes
and dream of those who died
of a war lost in treaties
made by those we called brothers.
Paper claimed our lands.
Bottles claimed our souls.*

*I dream of those,
eyes open in the snow,
who lie, their limbs
turning into cold fire.²²*

While it is difficult to tell with certainty, this passage may well refer to the events of the spring of 1799, when the Seneca did indeed “return from trading furs, their canoes awash with rum.” This being said, it could just as easily refer to a general pattern. The differences with Jackson's writing are striking. Whereas the Quakers most often refer to alcohol abuse in connection with the “indolence” and “unreasonableness” of the Seneca or their retention of “their former practices,” this text connects alcohol with the realities of colonialism, referring to several specific events in the recent history of the Seneca nation all of which have one thing in common: the alienation of land from the Seneca nation.

“Sullivan, the town destroyer” was the American general whom George Washington sent against the Six Nations Confederacy, in 1779, to “cut off their settlements, destroy their next Year's crops, and do them every other mischief which time and circumstances will permit.”²³ The attack, motivated by a desire to dismantle the Iroquois polity, much of which had been drawn into the war on the side of the British Empire, was devastating. Of the confederacy's thirty towns, twenty eight were leveled.²⁴ The Iroquois' food supply was also cut off, with over 160,000 bushels of corn being destroyed by Sullivan's troops.²⁵ When it was all over, five thousand Iroquois were left homeless, and of these almost half would die that winter from starvation, disease and exposure.²⁶ Even though Sullivan was eventually repulsed and the expedition was a tactical failure, the Six Nations Confederacy would never be the same again. Indeed, this was in Sullivan's raid that the foundation was laid for the mass expropriation of Six Nations

22 Joseph Bruchac, ed., *The Good Message of Handsome Lake* (Greensboro: Unicorn Press, 1979), 50.

23 Matthew Dennis, *Seneca Possessed* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 37.

24 *Ibid*, 39.

25 *Ibid*, 38.

26 Allan W. Eckart, *The Wilderness War* (New York: Little Brown & Company, 1978), 502.

territory following the war. Historian Matthew Dennis notes that many of the same men who served with General Sullivan would come back after the war as settlers, making Iroquois territory “the greatest source of confiscated wealth produced by the Revolution in New York.” According to Dennis, “the dispossessed Iroquois domain made life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness possible.”²⁷ It appears from the text of the Gaiwiio that Handsome Lake understood this truism all too well.

If Sullivan's raid destroyed the Seneca and the rest of the Six Nations Confederacy economically, the Battle of Oriskany devastated them politically. In the spring of 1777, two years before Sullivan's raid, the Seneca came to the siege of Fort Stanwix, they believed, as neutral observers. The result was that they were drawn into a bloody battle with other members of the Six Nations, effectively plunging the Confederacy into a state of civil war. The battle was apparently devastating both for the Seneca, who ended up being drawn onto the British side, and for the Oneida who fought with the Americans. According to Seneca governor Blacksnake, recalling the incident some years later, “the Blood shed was a stream running down.”²⁸

Yet, in spite of these events, by the end of the war, the Six Nations were still in a very good military position and believed that they were winning. Handsome Lake would have had good reason to call the American War of Independence a “war lost in treaties” for the Seneca. Even though the Six Nations had been a key player in the hostilities, they were not present at the peace conference that concluded the war, and the Treaty of Paris of 1783 handed over all Six Nations territory south of the Canadian border to the United States, making absolutely no provision for the maintenance of Iroquois sovereignty or territorial integrity.²⁹ The result was the massive and dramatic alienation of land from all of the Six Nations, including the Seneca. Under pressure from land speculators and the US government,

²⁷ Dennis, 35.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 37.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 39.

the Seneca and members of the confederacy sold almost all of their land at the treaties of Fort Stanwix in 1784 and Big Tree in 1797.³⁰ Weakened by war, displacement, starvation and epidemics, abandoned by their international allies and with their sovereignty no longer recognized under law, the Seneca held little power to resist the advances of Euro-American settlers and speculators such as Robert Morris and the Holland Land Company.

By the time the Quakers arrived at Jenuchshadago in 1798, the American War of Independence had altered the political economy of the Seneca nation forever. The Six Nations Confederacy, once one of the most powerful political units in North America, was no longer able to hold its members together and had ceased to be recognized as a legitimate body by surrounding settler states. The Seneca population had been halved – reduced to just over four thousand individuals – and its land base had been shorn to just two hundred thousand acres.³¹ While the Seneca had once occupied a contiguous territory of several thousand square miles, they were now reduced to a few isolated reservations spread throughout western New York, of which Jenuchshadago on the Allegheny was one.³²

It was to this set of events, rather than to individual moral failures or lack of industry or persistence in hunting that Handsome Lake attributed the problems with alcohol that the Seneca were experiencing. Thus the solutions that he offered were radically different from those put forward by the Quakers who, though sympathetic to the Seneca's situation, were still deeply implicated in the colonial process that had dispossessed them.

THE ECONOMICS OF THE GAIWIO

The *Gaiwio* begins with a strong condemnation of the economics of colonization, including both

30 *Ibid*, 39.

31 *Ibid*, 39.

32 *Ibid*, 39.

practices that the Quakers condemned (such as the sale of Rum) and those that they encouraged (the use of currency). The annual recitation of the Gaiwii begins with an explanation of how white settlers first came to America. It is said that there was, across the ocean, a young man (appropriately enough, a preacher) who had a vision of an invisible man who lived in a fabulous castle on an island in the middle of a river. The man told him that “across the ocean that lies toward the sun, there is another world” populated by people who are “virtuous and have no unnatural habits.” The man gives him a bundle of “five things that men desire” and is instructed to bring them across the ocean to trade with the people to make himself wealthy. These items are cards, coins, a violin, a flask of rum and a rotting leg.³³

After this, the young preacher finds a man who will listen to his story – Columbus – who takes the five things across the ocean, “discovers” America and reports his findings to the people in Europe. Then thousands of ships set out across the ocean to trade the five things with the people of the world across the sea. Then the man on the island laughed and said

These cards will make them gamble away their wealth and idle their time; this money will make them dishonest and covetous and they will forget their old laws; this fiddle will make them dance with their arms about their wives and bring about a time of tattling and idle gossip; this rum will turn their minds to foolishness and they will barter away their country for baubles; then will this secret poison eat the life from their blood and crumble their bones.³⁴

The story ends with the decision of the Creator to send Four Messengers to recall the people back to the old ways. No one listens to them until they find Handsome Lake, to whom they reveal the Good Message and whom they call to preach to others.³⁵

This story carries a moral character that is superficially similar to that which the Quakers preached. But the attendant worldview is entirely different. Christianity is implicitly condemned, as it is the preachers who bring the five things (which turn out to be gifts from Hanisseono, the Evil One) and

33 Parker, 17.

34 *Ibid*, 18.

35 *Ibid*, 19.

Handsome Lake is assigned to counter their effects by preaching the true religion. The story sets him up as the opposite of Christian missionaries of all sorts, Quakers included, not their ally. The way of life that Handsome Lake preached is set up, from the beginning of the Gaiwiio, as an alternative to integrating into colonial society and, moreover, as a way of resisting that society's ill effects, which are portrayed as being primarily economic. This includes the ill effect of Rum, which is primarily tied to the loss of land.

Where the Quakers offered sobriety, industry and civilization, Handsome Lake urged his followers to sobriety as part of a broader ethic that included land retention, mutual aid and piecemeal adaptation of Euro-American agricultural practices. He would, in particular, eventually gain a reputation for opposing the sale of land out of the nation. In 1801, at a council at Battle Creek, Red Jacket, the speaker of the Seneca Nation, proposed the sale of a valuable strip of land along the Niagara River to the state of New York. Not only did Handsome Lake oppose the sale, but, after it went through, he received a vision that showed Red Jacket being punished in the afterlife for allowing the alienation of Seneca land by being forced to carry wheel barrows full of dirt back and forth in the house of the punisher for all of eternity.³⁶ According to the Four Messengers,

Sagoyewat'ha is the name of the man who carries the dirt. It is true that his work is laborious and this is for a punishment for he was the one who first gave his consent to the sale of Indian reservations. It is said that there is hardship for those who part with their lands for money or trade. So now you have seen the doom of those who repent not. Their eternity will be one of punishment.³⁷

While there is some dispute over whether or not this is a fair description of Red Jacket's role in the Treaty of Big Tree and the sale of the Mile Strip, and while some have claimed that this revelation has more to do with Handsome Lake's political rivalry with the Buffalo Creek chief than it does with actual differences in policy towards the settler population, these caveats matter little for our purposes. What

³⁶ Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, 259.

³⁷ Parker, 68.

matters is that, for Handsome Lake, the loss of land was not just of immediate economic significance, but it held cosmic value as well. According to the Gaiwiiio, “You have the constant fear that the white race will wipe you out. The Creator will care for his real people.”³⁸ In the colonial conflict over land between the Seneca Nation and the United States, Divine Power clearly rested on the Seneca side.

Handsome Lake was equally severe in his criticism of those who did not practice shared economics and mutual aid. In one stop along the Sky Journey, Handsome Lake was shown how greed functioned to degrade people both physically and spiritually.

And as he watched,
he saw a large woman
sitting there.
She was grasping frantically
at all the things
within her reach
and because of her great size
she could not stand.
That was what he saw.

Then they asked him,
“What do you see?”

He answered,
“It is hard to say.
I saw a woman great of size,
snatching at all that was about her.
It seemed she could not rise.”

Then the messengers answered,
“It is true.
What you saw
was the evil of greed.
She cannot stand
and will remain thus forever.

Thus it will be always with those
who think more of the things of earth
than of this new world above.
They cannot stand upon the heaven road.”³⁹

This general principle is played out in a specific set of economic relationships that are mandated in

38 Bruchac, ed., *The Good Message of Handsome Lake*, 33.

39 *Ibid*, 34-35.

the Gaiwiio. Those who produce are to aid poor children and orphans, (for “the Creator truly loves the poor”⁴⁰), the elderly (“an old woman shall be as a child again and her grandchildren shall care for her”⁴¹) and those without food (“the Creator made food for all creatures and it must be free for all”⁴²). Handsome Lake also extolled the practice of *adanida'osha* or shared work. The Gaiwiio says that “some men have much work and they invite all their friends to come and aid them and they do so. Now this is a good plan and the Creator designed it. He ordained that men should help one another.”⁴³ This principle explicitly violates the notion of private property that the Friends were encouraging the Seneca to adopt. Indeed, all of these teachings are consistent with Jackson's recollection that Handsome Lake taught that people should “enjoy all things in common.” As the Friend himself pointed out, they are therefore quite inimical to the intentions of the Quaker mission, in spite of the agreement that existed between Handsome Lake and the Quakers about the virtues of sobriety.

The call to mutual aid is not limited to food or material goods. It also extends to social inclusion and medicine. The Code of Handsome Lake notes that “It has been a custom when someone knows a healing herb to ask payment for giving it to a patient. Now we say that this is not right. It is not right to demand compensation for treating the sick.”⁴⁴ Handsome Lake's teachings functioned to create a commons not only of material goods but of everything necessary to human well-being, including medicine and healing. It also guaranteed that the community of those following “the old way of Handsome Lake” would not be limited to those with economic means.

The political significance of Handsome Lake's exhortations to mutual aid is underscored by their pairing with other measures designed to improve community solidarity, particularly his condemnation of

40 *Ibid*, 23.

41 *Ibid*, 24.

42 *Ibid*, 25.

43 Parker, 39.

44 *Ibid*, 56.

gossip. In Parker's transcription of the Gaiwiiio, most of the commandments having to do with mutual aid are found towards the beginning of the second day of the recitation. In the midst of this section of the Code is a discourse on gossip that is posed in starkly political terms. The condemnation of go'diodia'se (literally "stories that grow by repetition") is justified by the statement that "the Creator...ordained that mankind should live as social beings in communities."⁴⁵ This condemnation is backed up by a cautionary parable about a woman who goes from house to house stirring up trouble between neighbors. At the end of the story, "great troubles arise" that eventually devolve into a physical fight.⁴⁶ The fact that these teachings are placed in the middle of a series of teachings on mutual economic aid strongly implies that one of the strongest imperatives to maintain community ties was for the economic well-being of the whole. In this, the Gaiwiiio's condemnation of gossip is not merely individualistic moralizing but is designed to maintain a community that will function as a single economic and social unit.

Handsome Lake also paired his anti-alcohol teachings with a cautious flexibility surrounding the use of Euro-American style agriculture. One of Handsome Lake's major religious innovations was to allow the use of sheep, swine and other domesticated animals in feasts and sacrifices on the grounds "at some future day the wile animals will become extinct."⁴⁷ This permission is indicative of Handsome Lake's broader attitude towards Euro-American agricultural practices as a necessary evil made imperative by the presence of the colonizing white population.

It was also revealed to Handsome Lake that:

Three things done
by our younger brothers
are right to follow.
The white man works a tract of land
and harvests food for his family,

45 Parker, 36.

46 *Ibid*, 37.

47 Parker, 42.

so if he should die
they have the ground for help.

If any of your people
have cultivated land
let them not be proud
on that account.

If one is proud,
there is sin within,
but without pride,
there is no sin.

The white man builds
a fine looking warm house
so if he dies
his family has the house for help.

Anyone who does this does right
if there is no pride.
If there is pride, there is evil,
without it all is well.

The white man keeps cattle and horses
and they are a help to his family
if he should die
his family has the stock for help.

No evil will follow
if the animals are fed well,
kindly treated
and not overworked.

Now all this is right
if there is no pride.

So they said and he said.
It was that way.

Upon first inspection, this revelation may seem strange in the link that it makes between white practices and the sin of “pride.” But this makes more sense in the context of the Quaker mission at Jenuchshadago. It is to be noted that whites are called “our younger brothers” in this text – an ironic designation given the attitude of mentorship that the Quakers took over the Seneca and the more general discourse of “civilization” that implied that whites had progressed further, not less, than indigenous peoples. Given the tensions that we observed in the initial encounter between the Quaker missionaries and the Jenuchshadago community and in the “cruel spring” of 1799, it may well be that “pride” here refers to the

attitude of the whites towards land and their own agricultural practices. While this interpretation may not be immediately apparent, it would explain why all of the contexts in which pride is explored in this passage refer to economic practices. There is not one criticism of other kinds of pride, so it is likely that the word here is a reference was to a far more specific sin.

The allowance for Euro-American agriculture is further qualified by the central place that hunting continues to have in the vision of Seneca society that Handsome Lake put forward. As late in his ministry as his stint at Tonawanda, which began in 1809, Seneca tradition tells us that he was advocating the continuance of farming as an element of Seneca economic life. The Code of Handsome Lake includes the following vision that makes this clear:

Truly you saw a man with meat enjoying himself. He was joyous because he was a prosperous and successful hunter and gave game as presents to his neighbors. So his neighbors were grateful and thanked him. Now the man you saw has departed from the earth. In his earth-life he cleansed himself each day, visited and enjoyed himself in his best clothing. He was ever good to his fellow-beings and so he is blessed and will receive the reward reserved for him by his creator.

This vision, revealed to Handsome Lake years after the initial encounter at Jenuchshadago points to the centrality and continuity of hunting as a holy economic practice in Handsome Lake's view. Years after the Quaker missionaries first tried to convince the Allegheny Seneca that hunting was making their men drunken and lazy, Handsome Lake still asserted that only through a mixture of hunting and farming could the Seneca be healthy and prosperous. It is important to note that this vision makes a clear link between the economics of mixed subsistence and the practice of mutual aid. The hunter shares game with his neighbors, defying both the tendency towards individual property rights and the push for men to stop hunting and start farming (individually owned) plots of land.

This reading would also make sense of the repeated emphasis that caring for one's family with the products of farming receives in this text. Instead of counseling that the Seneca take up farming

uncritically, Handsome Lake may well have been insisting that any adaptation of Euro-American agriculture would have to take place for the specific purpose of building up the community rather than for motives of profit or “civilization.” If this were the case, it would again be consistent with Jackson's observation that, under the Gaiwiiio, the Seneca “might farm a little, and build houses, but must not sell anything they raised on their land, but give it away to one another and especially to their old people; and in short, enjoy all things in common.”

CONCLUSION

In short, not only did Handsome Lake deliberately link the abuse of alcohol with the alienation of Seneca land and the repression of the Seneca polity, but he also put forward a specific program of economic reform that would address these problems. Viewed in this context, his emphasis on abstention from alcohol was nothing like that of the Quakers. While it is true that both valued sobriety, the Quakers and Handsome Lake attributed intemperance to virtually opposite causes. For the Quakers, drinking was common among the Seneca because they insisted on continuing to hunt and not fully embracing Euro-American style agricultural production. For Handsome Lake, the fault rested with the colonizing force that had displaced Seneca communities, confined them to reservations and sought to impose a system of private property on them. For the Quakers “little could be done for their improvement while the liquor lasted.” For Handsome Lake, “paper claimed our lands; bottles claimed our souls.”

This pattern is a reflection of the tensions that existed immediately before the revelation of the Gaiwiiio between the Quakers and various elements of the community at Jenuchshadago. While the Quakers had been invited to the village to teach the Seneca how to use the plow, they had brought with them a considerable amount of “baggage” about just what kind of economic transformation would constitute the “gradual civilization of the Indian natives” and how this was linked to the abuse of alcohol.

This created tensions with the Seneca, who responded to their overtures in diverse and often unpredictable ways, freely combining hunting with plowing. Into this picture came Handsome Lake, to whom it was revealed that not all white ways would be good for the Seneca and that the drunkenness which the Quakers blamed on loose Indian morals was actually due to (or at least associated with) white military, diplomatic and financial misconduct. To this he responded by advocating a set of economic practices that would allow the Seneca to do what the Quakers had originally been brought to Jenuchshadago to do: to selectively introduce Euro-American practices to allow the Seneca to continue to function as a society in spite of the loss of their land.

There is much evidence that this resistance bore significant fruit. The Quaker records indicate that the Seneca never did give up hunting, choosing rather to reassert their own agency in creating an economic system that would both preserve their cultural values and be sustainable for the long haul.⁴⁸ The Seneca, under the leadership of those like Cornplanter and Handsome Lake, were not unrealistic when evaluating their situation. But the gift of the Gaiwiiio also enabled them to avoid following the Friends blindly.

Handsome Lake was certainly not opposed to everything that the Friends stood for. But it would also be completely inappropriate to call the Quakers the “midwives of a new Indian religion” that took shape in his teachings. Rather, we might view Handsome Lake as one of many individuals trying to find a “middle ground” of negotiation, debate and occasional consensus between the Seneca and their Euro-American neighbors, including the Quakers. While he labored under the marked power imbalances of colonialism, Handsome Lake, along with all Seneca, exercised both spiritual and political agency by refusing to simply accept Euro-American political and economic methods. It is, in part, because of this

48 Jackson, “On the Civilization of the Indian Natives,” 45.

legacy of resistance that the Seneca exist as a polity today.

II. Land and Home as Spaces of Gendered Resistance: Quaker Patriarchy, Seneca Women's Resistance and the Compromises of Handsome Lake

When Handsome Lake received his visions from the Four Messengers of the Good Spirit, his community was in the midst of negotiating a complex relationship with the settler-colonial culture and state that was threatening to envelope them and, more specifically, with a set of Quaker missionaries living in their town of Jenuchshadago. While Cornplanter had invited these missionaries there to teach the Seneca about Euro-American agriculture, they had taken on a much broader role, attempting to completely remake the Seneca as a free-holding farming community in the image of the towns from which the Friends had come, characterized by individual male title to the soil, male-dominated agricultural labor and female domesticity in the home. The Gaiwiiio functioned to change some of the terms of engagement, enabling adaptation at some points and resistance at others. This is just as true in the area of gender roles and family structure as it is in the economic relationships associated with the various discourses of addiction and sobriety that we examined in the last chapter.

Just as Handsome Lake's teachings on addiction cannot be understood outside of the economic and political situation in which they were revealed, we also cannot underestimate the role of this context in the emergence of his views on gender. At the time of the revelation of the Gaiwiiio, the Quakers were aggressively promoting a wide variety of reforms in this area including, but not limited to, the introduction of male-dominated agriculture, the promotion of female production of domestic articles and the creation of monogamous, life-long marriages that would serve as the foundation for single-family homes that broke with the matrilineal, matrilocal pattern of marriage among the Seneca. These various reforms elicited various reactions from Seneca men and women, ranging from acceptance within a preexisting framework, to negotiation to outright rejection. In this chapter, we will examine several such

reforms initiated by the Quakers and show how Handsome Lake's teachings were positioned within a context of gendered struggle.

There were some areas in which Handsome Lake's teachings lined up relatively well with an already established pattern of female and Seneca resistance to the Quakers' vision. These particularly had to do with the gendering of agricultural labor. The Gaiwiiio treated female dominated agriculture and the attendant social features of matrilineally and matrilocality as both normative and beneficial. In other areas however, particularly having to do with norms of domesticity, Handsome Lake came down on the side of the Quakers. This being said, his teachings did not represent one hundred percent of the Seneca community and there is significant evidence from Quaker records that women in Seneca communities staunchly resisted the transformative vision that the Friends were propagating, with or without Handsome Lake's support.

THE PROMOTION OF MALE-DOMINATED AGRICULTURE

The Quakers prioritized the re-gendering of agricultural labor early on in their mission among the Seneca. When Halliday Jackson, Joel Swayne and Henry Simmons first arrived at Jenuchshadago, the two older members of the Indian committee that escorted them made a “farewell address” to a council called before they left the younger missionaries at the town. We have already examined this text, available to us through Jackson's *On the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Natives* through the lens of economics but it is worth taking the time to reconsider it and other data about the Quaker mission to the Allegheny Seneca in terms of gender and sexuality. The committee members, Jackson reports, “reminded [the council] of the unreasonableness of their present practice of letting their women work all day in the fields and woods...while they themselves were spending their time in idleness, amusing themselves with

bows and arrows and other useless practices.”¹

In our previous analysis of this passage, we looked at what it meant to define male hunting and military training as “useless practices” which the Quakers associated with idleness and drunkenness. Yet we would be remiss if we did not also note how the hypothetical economic transformation described here, which the Quakers would then spend the next thirty years trying to actualize, was highly gendered. If Seneca men replaced Seneca women in the fields, what would the women do? Moreover, if women were removed from their primary function in Seneca society, which was considered to be not only economic and social, but sacred, what would that do to the value of women generally?

It is important to note that the Friends of the committee made this speech a day after Jackson, Simmons and Swayne laid out their first farm just up the Allegheny river from Jenuchshadago. On this occasion, Jackson reports that the Women of the town, “to show their hearty and good will in the undertaking, had previously made a collection of some seed – corn, potatoes, bean, squashes and a variety of other garden seeds – which they presented to the Friends, observing that, 'it was very hard to come so far and have nothing to begin with.’”² While it is likely that this was a genuine gesture of hospitality towards the Quakers, since most scholars agree that relations were relatively amicable at this point, this should not keep us from also interpreting these women's actions in political terms as well. Given how blunt the Friends were about their desire to promote male-dominated agriculture, it is hard to believe that the women of the town, as proprietors of the soil, would not have known about this agenda and how their gifts might serve to remind the Friends that “gardening” among the Seneca was a thoroughly female domain. The very next day, the committee members focused on the “unreasonableness” of female agriculture in their speech to council. It is hard to believe that this is a coincidence. Rather, it is likely

1 Jackson, Halliday, *The Civilization of the Indian Natives* (Philadelphia and New York: Marcus TC Gould and Isaac T Hopper, 1830), 32.

2 *Ibid*, 32.

that the women of Jenuchshadago's gift of seeds was the opening volley in a cold war over cultivated land as gendered space.

This was to begin a pattern of considerable and varied resistance to this particular aspect of the Friends' program, from both men and women. We have already seen how Seneca men continued to hunt and trade in spite of Quaker admonitions to the contrary, and how the Gaiwiiio countered Quaker discourses that associated hunting with drunkenness, providing an alternative explanation of the problems of addiction that the Seneca were experiencing, rooted in their experience of dispossession after the American Revolution. But there is also considerable evidence of staunch female resistance to the transformation that the Quakers were trying to work. Even when they engaged with the Friends, Seneca women asserted their privileges with regards to agricultural labor through both symbolic and material steps. For example, just over a week after the events described above (on May 31, 1798), the Quakers plowed a field as a demonstration and Jackson reports that, among the impressed reactions of the Seneca, “Great numbers of people came flocking to the friends *especially the women*.”³ The Friends then responded in the manner that they thought appropriate to the gender roles at play and “distributed among them a variety of useful articles, such as needles, thread, scissors, comb, spectacles etc which were sent for that purpose.”⁴ In other words, when a matter of farming was brought up by the Quakers, the Seneca women came to investigate because they were entrusted with the sacred work of cultivating the land. The Quakers responded by applauding their interest but also by distributing among them “useful articles” - articles that, unlike the plow, would be useful to women in the model society that they were trying to engineer. This episode demonstrates both the high value that Seneca women placed on their own agricultural practices and the determination of the Quakers to remove those practices in order to make

3 *Ibid*, 33 (emphasis added)

4 *Ibid*, 33.

way for individual male title to the soil.

The attempts by the Quakers to teach what they saw as proper gender roles to the Seneca through the distribution of objects associated with those roles was a common practice. Two years later, upon the next visit by representatives of the Indian Committee, the Quakers specified that they would leave a set of smiths tools among the Seneca, as well as other such objects, “if some of your young men will learn the trade.”⁵ At another point, the Friends instituted an incentive program, offering men a dollar for every 25 bushels of wheat or rye that they could raise on their own land while reserving a dollar for women who could produce 12 yards of linen cloth.⁶ This made a profound statement about the contested politics of gender at Jenuchshadago. It was only men who could make money from the incentive program by farming, and only women who could do so by spinning and weaving. The economy that the Friends were building was clearly designed to re-gender the economy of Jenuchshadago along Euro-American patriarchal lines.

That the Friends were engaged in a process of re-gendering labor is made evident throughout their records. Even though the encounter summarized above ended with a note that several of the Seneca gathered took some farming implements “with a view of using them,” several months later, the Quakers were still frustrated that the men of Jenuchshadago were not farming. This is why “it was believed expedient, from the affecting circumstances, to have their chiefs and principle *men* collected in council...to encourage them to avail themselves of the present opportunity of gaining instruction in the cultivation of their land.”⁷ This is not surprising. It is to be recalled that when the Friends distributed farm equipment, it was mostly Seneca women, not men, who showed up to take possession of it. It is logical to assume that these attempts to incorporate Euro-American technologies into female agricultural

⁵ *Ibid*, 44.

⁶ Matthew Denis, *Seneca Possessed* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 129.

⁷ Jackson, 35.

labor rather than replace it with its male version did not stop once these tools reached their intended destinations. It is not surprising that Seneca communities where women took an interest in farming implements did not produce very many male farmers to use those implements.

Even when a “spirit of industry” later came upon the Seneca, men restricted themselves to performing tasks that were ancillary to farming but not concerned with the cultivation of the soil themselves. They fenced in lots, worked for wages on the Friends' farm and built houses.⁸ Rarely, and only after over a year of Quaker exhortations, did Seneca men actually plow fields and, if they did, it was only so that Seneca women could go over the furrows and seed them.⁹ In spite of this distinction, the first time that a man “took hold of the plough, and began to manage it himself” (which was not until the summer of 1800), he was “viewed as a matter of some surprise and excited great curiosity in the beholders.”¹⁰ While it is clear that the Quakers thought that this “surprise” and “excitement” was elicited by the fact of an “Indian” wielding a plow, it might be more accurate to say that it was elicited by a man engaging in any farming activity at all. Even after the Cruel Spring, when there was a brief, albeit important period when the Allegheny council resolved that men would hunt less and “assist their women in the fields,” there was absolutely no indication that men would ever replace women as the principle cultivators of the soil.¹¹ Moreover, where Seneca men did assist women with ancillary tasks such as fencing and drawing firewood, it is very likely that they were following earlier practices whereby some Seneca men had always helped women with such tasks or similar ones without taking over their fields themselves, a pattern that is well documented by historians.¹²

That the Quakers referred to Seneca territory as “their land” specifically referring to Seneca men

8 *Ibid*, 41.

9 *Ibid*, 35.

10 *Ibid*, 38.

11 *Ibid*, 36.

12 Denis, 152.

betrays a significant misunderstanding of Seneca cultural and economic values. This designation was simply at odds with the Seneca economic and cultural system of values surrounding land, which assigned the cultivation and therefore also the ownership of national land to the women.¹³ This is why, for example, women were often the most committed to the retention of national land and why the most common male proxy speakers for Seneca women in council, Red Jacket, gained a reputation among white settlers as one of the most militantly committed to the national independence of the Seneca.¹⁴

This stronger resistance among women was a pattern that also played out at Jenuchshadago. While there is much evidence that both men and women participated in the enterprise of preserving their gender balance in economics, there is also evidence that, in the absence of male solidarity, women would resist even if it meant confronting Seneca men as well as the Friends. The Quaker records observe that the transformation of agriculture into a male-dominated enterprise proceeded only in areas where the population was dispersed. The reason for this was the collective resistance of women to male intrusion into the cornfields. The more dispersed a population group was, the less collective power the women had and the easier it was for the Friends to force through the re-gendering of labor. Jackson writes, for example, that

A chief, who was not ashamed to be seen at work by the women of his own family, would probably have been mortified when discovered by a number of other females, who on such occasions did not always refrain from ridicule. Yet this false shame on the part of the men, and ridicule of the women, gradually wore away as they became familiarized by each others' assistance in their little agricultural labors.¹⁵

As we reviewed earlier, the result of the Friends' mission was not the complete transformation of agriculture into male labor but rather the creation of a new balance where men would fence lots, plow fields and draw in firewood but leave the task of actually sowing and reaping to women. This passage

¹³ *Ibid*, 89.

¹⁴ Christopher Densmore, *Red Jacket* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 51.

¹⁵ Jackson, "On the Civilization of the Indian Natives," 48.

indicates that that balance was not a mutually prearranged agreement between men and women, but a compromise emerging from female resistance not only against the Quakers but against their own men as well. What the Friends simply interpreted as awkwardness and unfamiliarity was more likely a concerted effort by women to set boundaries around their work and avoid the complete transformation of their society into the patriarchal model that the Friends had in mind.

Moreover, it does not appear that even this compromise position was universal. Many Seneca at Allegheny did not alter their agricultural practices at all to conform to the gender norms preached by the Quakers. Jackson reports that, in the spring of 1802, in the third year of the Quaker experiment, “many of the men still adhered to their ancient customs, and left the women of their families to cultivate with the hoe, hat corn and vegetables were necessary for their subsistence.”¹⁶ Bearing in mind the use of ridicule and other tools by Seneca women to keep men out of the fields, it may not have been entirely the Seneca men's idea to “leave their women in the fields.”

HANDSOME LAKE'S DEFENSE OF FEMALE AGRICULTURE

Thus, just like the struggle over Quaker-drawn lines between sobriety and “civilization,” the struggle over the re-gendering of agricultural work helped form the context in which Handsome Lake taught. During the time of his ministry, there was considerable resistance to the idea of male-dominated agriculture, much of which was led by women, even if some appears to have been more cooperative across Seneca groups. This is why it is important to note that, in the Code of Handsome Lake reaffirmed the expectation that women will work the land while they are young and be honored and cared for as elders. These teachings on Elder-care contain within them a renewal of the social bond between Seneca that privileged women because they worked the soil. One such text reads that

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 45.

Now the creator of mankind ordained that people should live to an old age. He appointed that when a woman becomes old she should be without strength and unable to work. Now the Creator says that it is a great wrong to be unkind to our grandmothers. The Creator forbids unkindness to the old. We, the messengers, say it. The Creator appointed this way: he designed that an old woman should be as a child again when she becomes so the Creator wishes her grandchildren to help her, for only because she is, they are. Whosoever does right to the aged does right in the sight of the Creator.¹⁷

Although this text reads like a simple exhortation to be kind to the elderly, the fact that the paradigmatic elder is a grandmother is interesting on several levels. First, the primary justification for caring for the elderly is that women are no longer able to work. This presumes and thereby reaffirms the Seneca tradition that the hard work of agricultural production was the domain of women and that the honor due to elderly women stemmed from their life of working in the fields. Furthermore, the call for grandchildren to care specifically for their grandmothers because “for only because she is, they are” reaffirms the Seneca emphasis on matrilineal descent. It is through the female line that obligations of mutual aid flow because it is this line that determines clan and lineage. In these two areas – women's work in the fields and primary role in establishing lines of descent – Handsome Lake's teachings could not be more different from those of the Quakers.

The presumption that agricultural labor will be a primarily female enterprise is also made in the condemnation of *yeno'skwaswa'do* (theft). In the correction to this moral fault, the Code says that “When a woman sees a new crop and wishes to eat of it in her own house, she must ask the owner for a portion and offer payment. Then may the owner use *her* judgment and accept recompense or give the request freely.”¹⁸ It is important to note that every character in this story – the potential thief, the woman who wants to eat of the crop and the crop's owner – are all female. There is little to no room made in this story for the possibility of male involvement in the production or ownership of *Diohe'ko* (corn, beans and

17 Arthur Parker *The Code of Handsome Lake* (Albany, NY: New York State University Press, 1912), 35.

18 *Ibid*, 39.

squash), which, interestingly enough, are also constructed as female.¹⁹

It is important to note that femininity is also tied to agriculture in the Sky Journey through the identification of a woman as the paradigmatic penitent. Immediately before entering the house of the Punisher and observing the torments that await those who do not repent, Handsome Lake has a vision of a woman who, coming to a fork in the heaven road between the narrow road to Tain'tciade, the heavenly realm and the wide, rough road to the domain of the Punisher, pauses while two parties of souls each urge her to come their way. Eventually, she is brought onto the narrow road that leads to the lands of the Creator. The Four Messengers explain that

The woman has lived a repented life for three days and has entered into the happy eternity. It was not an easy matter for her to do so of herself, but we, the heavenly messengers, have pled before the Creator and he has heard us. Three times we assist everyone who believes to continue in the faith of the Gaiwiiio.²⁰

No information is ever given about what this woman's wrongdoings were or what it meant for her to repent. The only clue is that, at this point in the Sky Journey, the term “repent” has only occurred once before, in the immediately preceding section. Sagoyewat'ha, the one who is forced to carry wheel barrow loads full of dirt for all of eternity, is described as representing “they who repent not.” The anonymous woman of Handsome Lake's next vision, then, is Red Jacket's opposite. She is the one who repents. This is particularly interesting given the specific nature of Sagoyewat'ha's crimes: he is the one who “first gave his consent to the sale of Indian reservations.”²¹ Repentance, or lack thereof, is primarily identified here with the issue of land. To refuse to repent is to continue “to sell land for money or trade.”

The gendered aspect of this discourse becomes even more clear when we recall that, during negotiations with the whites, it was often the women's camp that was the most vehemently opposed to the

19 Stephen Lewandowski, “Diohe'ko: the Three Sisters of Seneca Life,” in *Agriculture and Human Values*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Fall 1988), 76.

20 Parker, 69.

21 *Ibid*, 68.

sale of territory, because it was Seneca women who collectively owned and held sole right to cultivate agricultural lands. When it came to the issue of land, Seneca internal debates were highly gendered. This discourse strongly suggests that, when Handsome Lake opposed the sale of land, he was self-consciously taking the side of Seneca women over and against the attempts by the Quakers and some, though not all, Seneca men, to take away the power that stemmed from their agricultural labor.

The Code also speaks to the preservation of female leadership roles in religious matters, which was in great contrast to the common practices in Euro-American communities, including the Quakers. The Gaiwiiio specifically commands four rites, each assigned by one of the four messengers – the Osto'wago'wa (Great Feather Dance), the Gone'owo (Harvest Dance), the Ado'we (Sacred Song) and the Ganawe'gowa (Peach Stone Game).²² These rites are made the sole property of two groups of religious – Honon'diot, of whom Parker notes the majority are women, who are “keepers of the dances” and Godi'ont (singers) who are exclusively female. The authority of these individuals, particularly the Godi'ont is quite strong, and the Code notes that these individuals are divinely appointed and led:

You have not previously been aware that when a Godi'ont is appointed you have not appointed her. No, for the Great Ruler has chosen her. A road leads from the feet of every Godi'ont and Hono'diot towards heaven. Truly this is so only of they who do right before the creator. So they said and he said. Eniaiehuk.²³

This discourse is of a piece with the emphasis on right knowledge that runs throughout the whole Gaiwiiio. The purpose of the four messengers and the ministry of Handsome Lake himself is to give the Seneca the right knowledge of how to live in the world. The fact that the keepers of sacred knowledge are mostly women therefore cannot be underestimated in its significance.

FEMALE LABOR AND DOMESTIC ECONOMICS

²² *Ibid*, 41.

²³ *Ibid*, 41.

Of course, agriculture was not the only area in which the Seneca were being encouraged to adopt different gender roles. In 1805, two new Friends arrived at Allegheny, and these were women who were keepers of a very different kind of knowledge, the “various branches of housewifery.”²⁴ One of the two women had had previous experience among the Oneida which, rightly or wrongly was thought by the Friends and others to have been the furthest assimilated of any of the Six Nations (at the very least, it was the nation with a reputation of being the most receptive to Christianity, though we, unlike missionaries of the time, must be critical as to whether or not this corresponded, then or ever, to a desire to assimilate). Regardless, at least in the minds of the Quakers, especially given how long they waited before bringing in “the arts of housewifery,” the construction of domestic femininity was very much associated with the politics of cultural assimilation.

It may not have been so for the Seneca, however. Jackson reports that there was “much excitement and satisfaction” expressed upon the arrival of the female missionaries.²⁵ Given the evident resistance to assuming western gender roles, we must be dubious of the supposition that Seneca women were simply eager to become good housewives to their farmer husbands. One possible explanation is that, even at this time, there was interest among Seneca women in adopting certain practices that Euro-American culture constructed as “domestic” for more economical reasons. Seneca women would later go on to produce large quantities of “domestic” items as part of the Quaker reform program while still retaining their role as farmers in the same way that men continued to hunt while adding construction and trading to their repertoire as part of an ongoing process of adaptation to a changing economy.²⁶ Jackson reported that this was partially made possible by the adoption of labor saving technologies in agriculture, specifically plows and mills, freed women's time up to be devoted to spinning cloth and making soap.

24 Jackson, “Civilization of the Indian Natives”

25 *Ibid*, 50.

26 Denis, 87.

The Quakers, of course, thought of this as a great advance in the development of proper feminine mores, arguing that “as the men became more accustomed to labor, it released the women from their former drudgery; and having now the opportunity to get all their grain ground, which before they had to pound in wooden mortars, it would afford them more time to turn their attention to the business of the house.”²⁷

A better reading of the situation, however, might be to say that, while women continued to farm, various economic changes made this a less time consuming activity and allowed them to move into other areas of economic production. Women did not, however, cease to “labor” but rather moved from one area of production to another, which merely happened to be differently constructed by the Quaker observers who are telling us the story. It is important to remember that, as we mentioned in the last Chapter, the Quakers defined “work” very narrowly – as male cultivation of individually held plots of land. There is no evidence that the Seneca held this position, however. Thus there is no reason to assume that Seneca women who began spinning, weaving, making soap and cleaning houses thought that they were doing any less “work” than did when they labored in the fields. Nor was there any reason for Seneca women to think that it was not possible to mix these various activities as circumstances demanded.

PATRIARCHY AND DOMESTICITY

Other parts of the Quaker program surrounding gender roles were far more aggressive, however. Specifically, in 1806, the Quakers started to become very aggressive about promoting monogamy and fidelity in marriage. This was in stark contrast to the previous pattern of marriage among the Seneca, in which unions could be dissolved with relative ease and new partners introduced to replace the old without social stigma. One incident from Jackson's report is very telling.

One thing, not hitherto noted, was earnestly pressed upon them; to live in peace and harmony with their wives, and

²⁷ Jackson, “Civilization of the Indian Natives,” 50.

not to let trifling matters part them, as was sometimes their practice; but to consider them as companions for life; and also to live in peace and friendship with one another, which would enable them to make greater progress in the good work [the] Friends were endeavoring to promote among them.²⁸

It is clear that the Quakers now felt confident enough in the legitimacy that they had accrued among the Seneca to engage in a far more radical kind of social transformation. In Seneca culture, single-family dwellings based around a life-long monogamous married couple were virtually unheard of before the nineteenth century. Instead, a multi-family, matrilineal and matrilocal longhouse system prevailed in which partners changed frequently, often at the initiative of the woman.²⁹

This change had the potential to dramatically disempower women in Seneca society. Whereas previously the matrilineal, matrilocal and multi-family patterns of marriage had created large groups of related women who could act as a check on male power, the new permanent, single-family patterns being introduced by the Quakers eliminated this advantage. It is easy to imagine how this change might engender staunch resistance from Seneca women. While, as of 1807, it was common for women to spin and sew in the winter and sow and reap in the spring and summer, producing corn in one part of the year and linen in another, the Friends do not report that female domesticity was very popular, though they may have thought that it was.³⁰ Jackson reports, for example, that women would not do the housework that the Quakers instructed unless they were actually present and often, “as the Friends approached some of their habitations, a pleasing mark of neatness discovered itself among some of the women, who would immediately begin to sweep their houses, and appear somewhat disconcerted if the Friends entered their doors before they got their apartments in good order.”³¹ While Jackson interpreted the women's actions as a sign of their enthusiasm to become good housewives, we might more accurately portray this as yet

28 *Ibid*, 52.

29 Denis, 32-33.

30 *Ibid*, 53.

31 *Ibid*, 52.

another kind of creative resistance among Seneca women to the Friends' social engineering. Put bluntly, it is far more likely that the women of whom Jackson writes were “faking it” rather than actually enjoying the act of cleaning house for their men.

Thus we can see that the Friends promotion of male-dominated agriculture was one part of a much broader agenda of gendered social transformation among the Allegheny Seneca. We cannot talk about this transformation in all or nothing terms, as if the Seneca either completely adopted the Euro-American patriarchal model or completely rejected it. Rather, individual reforms met with a variety of reactions. Seneca women resisted and then, at least in some instances, reached a compromise on the question of agricultural labor, maintaining the essential aspects of horticulture as their sacred domain while allowing men to plow and fence lots. The production of linen, soap and other “feminine” objects was integrated into an annual cycle of labor that still included agriculture with relative ease. The relegation of women to domestic servitude of men in single-family houses, however, was staunchly resisted by Seneca women and there is no evidence of female acceptance of this model in any quarter.

GENDER POLICING IN THE GAIWIIO

This range of reactions to the gendered social engineering of the Friends among Seneca men and women was matched by a diversity of acceptance and rejection of various elements of their program in the visions of Handsome Lake. We have already reviewed how and why it seems that the visions of the Four Messengers promoted a continued presence of women in agricultural labor. There are other aspects of the patriarchal program, however, that Handsome Lake seemed to be more accepting of. In particular, his visions betray a significant degree of patriarchal sentiment in the way that they talk about sexuality and promote a family model that is eerily similar to that being promoted by the Quakers. Indeed, on certain points pertaining to gender, Handsome Lake appears to be closer to Jackson, Simmons and

Swayne than he is to Seneca women in their resistance to the Quaker program described above.

We can find an example of this in the apocalyptic discourse found towards the end of the second day of recitations in Arthur Parker's translation of the Gaiwiiio. The picture that this tradition paints is a bleak one. It is filled with "every poisonous animal" and the "forces of nature will stand still." Those who truly believe in Gaiwiiio will "enter into sleep. As they lie down to sleep they will be in health and as they sleep the creator will withdraw their lives for they are true." Finally, the whole world will be destroyed by fire.³²

In the midst of all this, one sign that the end is coming will be the open practice of witchcraft. The Code of Handsome Lake says that

A time will come when a woman will be seen performing witch spells in the daylight. Then you will know that the end is near. She will run through the neighborhood boasting of how many she has slain by her sorcery. Then you will see how she who refused to believe in Gaiwiiio will suffer punishment.³³

The specter of the witch haunts the whole of Handsome Lake's message and the end times discourse is just one example. The most famous picture of witchcraft found in the Code of Handsome Lake is in the section of the Sky Journey discourse devoted to the House of the Punisher. There, Handsome Lake sees a woman being repeatedly thrust into a caldron of boiling hot water and frozen outside of it. The Messengers tell him that "the woman whom you saw will suffer two deaths in this place and when her body is reduced to dust the Punisher will gather them up again and conjure the dust back into a living body and continue his sport until finally he has become weary when he will blow her ashes to destruction."³⁴ As Matthew Denis points out, the witch is different from other sinners whom Handsome Lake sees punished. She is not only tormented. She is completely obliterated, her first death on earth not

³² Parker, 58.

³³ *Ibid*, 57.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 72.

being enough. It is interesting to note that Handsome Lake's sky journey occurred just a few months after the council at Jenuchshadago voted to execute a witch whom it was believed had killed Cornplanter's daughter.³⁵ It would not be unreasonable to read this text as a reference to that instance, a justification of male violence against a woman in order to protect the women who are under him. Thus the execution of the witch, and her punishment in Handsome Lake's vision, functions to police the new gender roles that are being introduced among the Seneca by white settlers and missionaries. Disturbingly enough, it appears that, after the introduction of the Gaiwiiio among the Seneca, not only did witch hunting go up for a time but, more permanently, the image of the witch in Seneca culture became more and more identified with the disobedient woman.³⁶

Generally, women are often identified in the Code of Handsome Lake with disobedience and immorality. The passage on Greed which we reviewed in the last chapter, features a woman who grasps at everything around her and cannot rise because she is so heavy with “the things of the world” and appears at the very beginning of Handsome Lake's “journey on the sky road.” This vision, revealed to Handsome Lake in August of 1801 is the longest unified section of the Gaiwiiio and lays out an overarching sketch of the cosmology and morality that are central to the “old way of Handsome Lake.”³⁷ This sets up a pattern that will continue throughout Handsome Lake's journey through the afterlife – of a man as the paradigmatic faithful and obedient person and of a woman as the paradigmatic sinner. It is through this discourse that the specter of female witchery is made manifest throughout the text.

Witchcraft is not the only image that is used to police the behavior of women in the Gaiwiiio. When the Four Messengers first appeared to Handsome Lake together, they revealed to him four words, which stand for four evils that sadden and anger the creator. These four were One'ga (rum/whiskey),

35 Denis, 83.

36 *Ibid*, 82.

37 Parker, 62.

Got'go (witchcraft), Ono'ityi'yende (charms) and Yondwi'nias (literally “she cuts it off by abortion”).³⁸ Of these four, the first three are not explained in detail save to indicate that they “cause a heap of bones to pile up.” The fourth, however, receives a detailed description that reveals the way that Seneca notions of gender and sexuality were evolving.

Now the creator ordained that women should bear children. Now a certain young married woman had children and suffered much. Now she is with child again and her mother, wishing to prevent further sufferings designs to administer a medicine to cut off the child and to prevent forever other children from coming. So the mother makes the medicine and gives it. Now when she does this she forever cuts away her daughter's string of children. Now it is because of such things that the Creator is sad. He created life to live and he wishes such evils to cease. He wishes those who employ such medicines to cease such practices forevermore. Now they must stop when they hear this message. Go and tell your people.³⁹

As mentioned earlier, in condemning rum, Handsome Lake roundly denounced European trading and land alienation and counseled his followers to resist these tendencies through land retention, mutual aid and selective use of Euro-American agricultural practices. When he condemned witchcraft, he was standing largely in line with previous teachers, though, as we shall see, his teachings changed the way that witchcraft was gendered among the Seneca. In condemning abortion, however, something very different was going on. He was, as a male religious leader, condemning knowledge and practices that had previously been exclusively female. This is evidenced by the nature of the practices and by the fact that every character in the parable cited above is a woman.

The next six formal commandments have to do with marriage. They include: a prohibition on men abandoning women with children, a prohibition on men or women divorcing one another, a prohibition on mothers of married women gossiping with their daughters, bigamy and adulterous desire.⁴⁰ It is important to note that all of these are designed to ensure permanent, stable, monogamous marriages, which had previously not been standard among the Seneca. Following this are a series of commandments having to

³⁸ *Ibid*, 27-30.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 31-33

do with good relations between parents and children: parents should discipline their children within moderation and heed their children when they warn them against bad behavior, fathers should not touch their children while drunk and people should not gossip about the legitimacy of a child after it is born.⁴¹ Like the commandments that deal with relations between husbands and wives, these seem to be designed to maintain a stable, monogamous, nuclear family as the primary social unit among the Seneca.

Yet if women are the paradigmatic penitents in the Sky Journey discourse, they also comprise the majority of the sinners who are consigned to the House of the Punisher, as well as those who are tortured the most severely. Moreover, unlike men, most of the sins that women pay for in eternal fire are sexual in nature. The entire section of the Sky Journey devoted to the House of the Punisher is introduced with an account of a woman who, as Handsome Lake and the four messengers approach, stretches out her arms to them calling for help. The messengers reply that “It is beyond our power to alter your condition now. Our work was with you on earth. Too late.”⁴²

Men are punished in Handsome Lake's vision, for the most part, with physical pain. The drunk is forced to imbibe molten metal to “warm yourself as you once did.”⁴³ The abusive husband is forced to strike a red hot image of a woman.⁴⁴ The violinist is made to saw his arm off.⁴⁵ Women, on the other hand, are punished not only with physical pain but specifically through sexual degradation.⁴⁶ A woman who used *on'oityi'yende* (secret powders) to attract men is displayed nude with her hair replaced by “writhing serpents.” She “was greatly ashamed but could not cover her nakedness.”⁴⁷ The physical pain of this transfiguration would seem to be less than that of drinking liquid metal, but the text is clear that

41 *Ibid*, 34-35.

42 *Ibid*, 70.

43 *Ibid*, 71.

44 *Ibid*, 72.

45 *Ibid*, 73.

46 Denis, 69.

47 Parker, 72.

her primary means of punishment is to be shamed sexually. The punishment of the woman “whose delight was *gaknowe'haat*”⁴⁸ or, copulation is for the Punisher to repeatedly penetrate her with red hot pieces of metal. Handsome Lake sees that there are three large piles of such pieces of metal, one red, one white, one black. Not only does this reinforce the idea that this woman will suffer eternally, but they also correspond to the colors most often associated with the three main racial groups in America at the time – Red for indigenous people, White for Euro-Americans and Black for slaves imported from Africa.⁴⁹

The implication here is that this woman, who exercised too much sexual agency apart from men will now be punished by being subordinated once again through sexual violence. Rape – in this case rape that is global in scope, cosmic in implication and eternal in duration – is used to police the sexual agency of women. It is even more telling that the Four Messengers do not bother to give Handsome Lake a detailed explanation of this woman's sins. They simply say that “you have seen the punishment of the immoral woman.”⁵⁰ Sexual immorality is therefore the archetype of all feminine wrongdoing and sexual violence sets the pattern for all punishment that is to be meted out on women's bodies.

CONCLUSION

Handsome Lake's visions leave us with a sense of theological vertigo, mostly by virtue of the fact that they do not allow us to easily pick a “side.” Are we to be “for” his agenda of preserving female dominance in agriculture, the source of so much female power in Seneca society or “against” the drives within his Code to create male-dominated single-family homes? And if we do choose to sympathize with his agenda, how can we do so in good conscience, knowing that, buried in the lodge of the Punisher, there are women whom Handsome Lake envisioned being raped, flayed nude and otherwise shamed and

48 *Ibid*, 73.

49 *Ibid*, 73.

50 *Ibid*, 73.

humiliated in the interests of promoting patriarchal norms?

I am not going to argue that we should simply ignore these moral questions in the interests of doing good history. Good history is, partially, a moral undertaking. I would submit, however, that to get a full picture of Handsome Lake, we have to acknowledge both the aspects of his Gaiwiiio that seem to be liberating and those which reinforce gendered oppression. Without erring too much on the side of praising Handsome Lake, however, we can notice some commonalities between his teachings on gender and other areas. The preservation of Seneca land, not only as a means of promoting sobriety but also as an essential foundation of the gendered order of Seneca culture, runs throughout the Gaiwiiio. Like addiction, gender becomes about land when Handsome Lake covers it. We will see a similar pattern emerge when we speak of the his reimagination of his people's national identity.

III. Longhouse Remixed: Handsome Lake and the Re-Imagination of Seneca National Identity

We have already seen that Handsome Lake's visions and teaching came at a time when the Seneca were negotiating a complex relationship with the Quakers. When Halliday Jackson, Henry Simmons and Joel Swayne first arrived in Jenuchshadago, they were there at the Cornplanter's invitation. At the same time, however, the relationship between the Friends and many of the Seneca was tense at best. For example, even though his request was for technical and educational assistance, the Friends described their aims to the Allegheny Seneca as being “to improve the condition of the Indian natives, and to teach them the ways of good and honest white people.”¹ The Quakers did not simply wish the Seneca to take on certain economic practices or gender roles. Rather, they sought the wholesale conversion of the Seneca nation to the emerging Euro-American way of life. In this, they were in line not only with other missionaries, but with Federal Indian policy generally.

Thus, perhaps one of the most important functions that the Gaiwiiio of Handsome Lake played both at the time of its revelation and later on was the preservation and renewal among the Seneca that it was possible, in the “new world” constructed by settlers, Euro-American states, missionaries and land speculators, for them to exist at all. The visions that Handsome Lake received from the Four Messengers did this on a number of levels. First, they called into question the narratives and ideologies of settler communities, attempting to discredit these ideas among Seneca who might be tempted to adopt them and to give those who rejected them new weapons with which to do so. Second, they reasserted the validity of those Seneca constructions of identity that were most under threat, stressing the importance of keeping up rituals and traditions that were most affected by pressures to assimilate. Finally, they recommended to the Seneca a set of policies, particularly in the realm of education, that, while implemented with varying

1 Jackson, “Civilization of the Indian Natives,” 30.

degrees of rigor by Seneca leaders, seem designed to preserve Seneca cultural knowledge and deny missionaries and other agents of assimilation access to ordinary Seneca.

THE QUAKER IDEOLOGY OF ASSIMILATION

Halliday Jackson titled his account of Quaker missions among the Seneca and other communities “The Gradual Civilization of the Indian Natives.” This ought to leave historians under no illusions as to whether or not the Quakers were assimilationists in their Indian policy. Other details drawn from the Friends' records of their own missions, read carefully, confirm this agenda and Seneca resistance to it. When Cornplanter invited the Quakers to come to Allegheny, he was asking for technical assistance and support in the Seneca's legal dealings with land speculator Robert Morris and the Holland Land Company. This request had little to do with cultural assimilation, yet it is clear from their stated intention to teach the Seneca “the ways of good honest white people,” that that is exactly what they had in mind. Assimilation was the goal, even though it was explicitly left out of what the Friends were asked to do.²

It is interesting to note that not only did the Friends respond with a promise to teach the Seneca and other nations the “necessary arts of civil life” but that they also sent this response by way of Timothy Pickering, then the Secretary of State, as opposed to one of their own couriers. This was the representative of the administration which, at the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784, had refused to even recognize the existence of the Six Nations Confederacy and had strong-armed the Seneca and other Iroquois nations to give up all claim to lands west of the Ohio river. That same administration, while grudgingly recognizing the Confederacy in theory at later negotiations had, first at the Treaty of Canandaigua in 1794 and then at the Treaty of Big Tree in 1795, gradually whittled down Seneca territory to a few scattered reservations in Western New York. The diplomatic representative of this very same

² Halliday Jackson, *The Civilization of the Indian Natives* (Philadelphia: Marcus TC Gould, 1830), 30.

government would carry the Friends' overtures to the Seneca and other Six Nations communities and commend it to them, saying that "I have the great pleasure to inform you, that your good friends, the Quakers, have formed a wise plan to show your young men and boys the most useful practices of the white people."³ Clearly, the US Government was only too happy for the Friends to have missionaries among the Seneca and saw this goal as being in the best interests of their policy of land alienation and white settlement.

REJECTING THE WAYS OF THE "WHITE MAN"

In order to clear away space for a re-articulation of Seneca national identity, the Gaiwiiio makes harsh criticisms of the legal and political aspects of the Euro-American settler state. At one point on the sky road journey, Handsome Lake is shown a strong building which contains a whip, a pair of handcuffs and a hangman's rope – the implements of Euro-American justice. The Four Messengers, who are accompanying him, explain that

Truly it is a strongly built house. It is a prison. Now it is true that three things are there for punishment. How hard it is for a transgressor to see that he should be punished; yet it is the cry of the people that the laws of the white man are better than the teachings of Gaiwiiio. This frightens even the Great Spirit for he knows the punishment of those who say such things.⁴

This discourse essentially revolves around three sets of justice. The first is that of the white man, which is denounced as harsh, even brutal. The second is "the teachings of Gaiwiiio" - that is, the system of confession and repentance that Handsome Lake introduced among the Seneca. The third is the Creator's judgement of each person. Even the Creator is afraid of the punishment that is reserved for those who follow white laws rather than the Gaiwiiio. It is harsher than the punishment that the white criminal justice system can mete out. And yet it is also mobilized to support Handsome Lake's system of

³ *Ibid*, 11.

⁴ Arthur Parker, *The Code of Handsome Lake, the Seneca Prophet* (Albany: New York State Museum Bulletin, 1913), 64.

confession, which is posited as an alternative to this and presented as a more humane option than the police, courts and prisons of the whites.

Just as one vision of a strong house denigrated the state, another, immediately following, did so to the Church. This time, there is a road leading up to the house but no door and it is described as a “house with a spire” (i.e. a Church). Inside he can hear the voices of people screaming. The messengers explain to him that “it is a hard matter for Indians to embrace these conditions, that is, to embrace the belief of Bible believers.”⁵ Other parts of the Code reinforce this rejection of the Christian religion. One story says that there was a man who was unsure of his repentance for an unnamed offense who decided to offer tobacco to the Four Messengers in hopes that they would reveal to Handsome Lake whether or not it was valid. After his next audience with the Four Messengers, Handsome Lake said that “it is a hard matter for he, the questioner, is two minded.”⁶ Later on, the man, named Segwai'do'gwi converted to Christianity and nothing could persuade him to “return to the right way.”⁷ In all of these ways, the Gaiwio fought just as strongly against the Church as it did against the state.

The Euro-American State and Church are not only rejected in the form of buildings, however. This rejection is restated, albeit in a subtler manner, when Handsome Lake encounters two individuals who, more than anyone else at this time, embody settler government and religion. “The first and oldest President of the United States” is to be seen in a house that is suspended in midair. George Washington “enjoys himself because he is the only white man so near the new world of our Creator.” The reason for this, however, has nothing to do with preventing white Americans from being taxed without representation in the British Parliament. According to Handsome Lake's vision, rather, the struggle between the “thirteen fires” [the thirteen British colonies that seceded to become the United States] and

5 Parker, 50

6 *ibid*, 56.

7 *ibid*, 57.

the King of England was really all about the Iroquois:

Said the King, “you have overpowered me, so now I release everything that was in my control, even these Iroquois my helpers. It rests with you what shall be done with them. Let them be to you a thing for sacrifice.” Then said the president, “I shall let them live and go back to the places that are theirs, for they are an independent people.” So it is said. Now this man did a great work. He has ordered things that we may enjoy ourselves, as long as the sun shines and the waters run. This is the doing of our Great Creator.⁸

While this vision may seem naïvely trusting of the American government, upon further reflection it appears to be an extremely sophisticated (not to mention inflammatory) analysis of the politics of the American Revolution. There are several reasons for this.

To start off with, the major point of struggle between Washington and the King is not American independence or even the fate of the Seneca, but specifically the Iroquois. As Seneca historian Matthew Denis points out, it was not uncommon for the same American veterans who had fought the British and the Iroquois in western New York to return to that very area as settlers. In Dennis' words “Indian land made life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness possible in western New York.”⁹ This is a crucial point, given that, for over a decade after the Revolution the Federal Government refused to even acknowledge the existence of the Six Nations Confederacy. This was made especially evident at the treaty of Fort Stanwix. Even after this policy was softened, both the Federal Government and the various state governments, as well as land speculators and missionaries, chose to deal with individual nations rather than the whole confederacy. This significantly weakened the position of the Seneca. Thus even the political units that Handsome Lake chooses to identify and speak in terms of constitute a reaffirmation of Seneca sovereignty.

It is also deeply important that the vision cites the policies of the Federal Government, specifically. By the time of Handsome Lake's sky journey, the Seneca were virtually besieged by land

⁸ *ibid*, 66.

⁹ Denis, 35.

speculators and state Indian agents trying to convince them to sell their land. The reassertion that they could relate to the United States on a nation-to-nation basis was a crucial riposte to this that was often repeated by Seneca leaders. This would be demonstrated again thirty years later, when New York tried to bring a Seneca man named Tommy Jemmy to trial in a state court. Red Jacket would argue that, because the Seneca had never made a treaty with New York State, only with the United States, that they were under no obligation to allow New York Law to be enforced on their territory.¹⁰ The same set of political assumptions runs through Handsome Lake's vision of George Washington.

Of course the deepest and the most obvious affront to the myth of America's foremost founding father is that “he is the only white man so near the new world of our creator.”¹¹ In other words, although Washington is the greatest of white men, he holds this status only because of his agreement to guarantee Iroquois independence and, moreover, he is, it is implied, the least among those (primarily Seneca) people who have been brought to the “new world of our creator.” While Handsome Lake's vision of a prison rejected white government outright, his vision of George Washington does so by subsuming the American independence story into the broader, overarching narrative of Iroquois survival and autonomy. In a historical period when whole indigenous populations, including the Seneca, were being both literally and discursively swallowed up by the expanding American Empire, this was a truly radical vision.

No less radical are the implications of Handsome Lake's vision of the personal embodiment of Euro-American religion, Jesus Christ, whom he assigns a Seneca name, *Sega'hedus* or, “he who resurrects.”¹² The importance of this encounter cannot be underestimated, given the role that white missionaries were playing in Seneca national life at this point. Itinerant missionaries from a variety of denominations often passed through western New York and were repeatedly rejected by the Seneca.

¹⁰ Denis, 1.

¹¹ Parker, 63.

¹² *Ibid*, 68.

Indeed, one of the most famous Seneca manifestos against colonization was Red Jacket's reply to one such missionary, John Alexander. In spite of their differences, Handsome Lake's vision of Sega'hedus and Red Jacket's reply speech share several common features that are worth mentioning. This in turn demonstrates that Handsome Lake's rhetoric was part of a broad pattern of rhetoric that included even his political rivals.

Handsome Lake's encounter with the Christian messiah functions partially as a backhanded comment on white religion and colonial practices. Sega'hedus tells Handsome Lake that “you are more successful than I, for some believe in you but none in me.”¹³ The implication here is, of course, that white settlers, who claimed legitimacy for their theft of Iroquois lands by a doctrine of divinely ordained expansion were not acting in accordance even with their own religion, much less the Creator's Gaiwiio. This idea that whites were not real followers of Jesus is reinforced by Sega'hedus' statement that white people “slew me because of their independence and unbelief.”¹⁴ Far from being Jesus' true followers, the whites are Christ-killers, betrayers, people upon whom Sega'hedus has “shut the doors of heaven that they may not see me again until the earth passes away.”¹⁵ Sega'hedus ends with an instruction for Handsome Lake to “tell your people that they will be lost if they follow the ways of the white man.”¹⁶ Clearly, the crimes of the whites who killed Jesus are intimately connected with the crimes of the whites who are now trying to convert the Seneca. The whites are illegitimate in their “Christian” excuses for the dispossession of the “heathen” Seneca, precisely because they are themselves Christ-killers.¹⁷

The theme of Christ-killing runs through a wide range of Seneca-settler dialogue and is particularly noticeable in some of Red Jacket's published speeches. In 1805, when speaking on behalf of

13 *Ibid*, 67.

14 *ibid*, 67.

15 *ibid*, 67.

16 *ibid*, 68.

17 There is some poetic irony here in so far as the accusation of Christ-killing was leveled at a colonial society that historically used this very same rationale for the dispossession and persecution of the Jews.

the nation to Reverend John Alexander of the New York Missionary society, Red Jacket noted that “your book says that the Son was sent on earth by the father – did all the people who saw the son believe him? No, they did not, and the consequences must be known to you, if you have read the book.”¹⁸ One cannot help but notice the resonances here with Handsome Lake's observation that the whites whom Jesus spoke to rejected and killed him because of “their unbelief and independence.”

It is interesting to note that, after Handsome Lake's initial visions, the Quaker missionary Joel Swayne, who was living in Jenuchshadago at the time, reports to us that Cornplanter specifically discussed the issue of Christ-killing with the Friends when they came to visit him the day after Handsome Lake told his visions in council. Cornplanter's remarks specifically linked the issue of Seneca assimilation/adaptation of white economic and cultural practices with Handsome Lake's vision of Segahedus.

The old Chief said he liked some ways of the white people very well, and some ways of the Indians also, and he thought it would take some length of time, to lead them out of all their own Customs, & as to their Worship Dance which they hold twice a year, they intended to keep it up, as they could not read, they knew of no other way of Worshipping the great Spirit, if they declined that they would have no manner of Worship at all. further said it was the white people who kill'd our Saviour how he had heard about our Saviour I know not, but it seems he had. I told him it was the Jews, who Crucify'd or kill'd Him, and whether they were white, red, or black or what couler they were of I knew not, neither did I know but Indians were their descendants; for as many of their habits were Similar to the Jews, in former days. Yet nevertheless, I told him we were all still, Crucifying & killing Him, while we were doing Wickedly. He said that was very true, very true. Several other Indians being present. Thus matters ended at that time.¹⁹

It is not unfair to argue that Cornplanter and Swayne are, to a certain extent, talking at cross-purposes here. This would explain why Cornplanter so easily assents to Swayne's last argument, that “we are all still Crucifying and killing him, while we are doing wickedly” even though, only moments ago, he had seemed so hostile to the doctrines of white Christianity. Wickedness as a form of Christ-killing would be something very easy to agree with from Cornplanter's position given the parallels with Handsome Lake's

18 Christopher Densmore, *Red Jacket* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 142.

19 Wallace, Anthony ed., “Halliday Jackson's Journal to the Seneca Indians, 1798-1800 Part II,” in *Pennsylvania History* Vol. 19, No. 3 (July 1952), 349.

conversation with Segahedus. If whites are not the true followers of Jesus, but rather Christ-killers, because they did wickedly towards the Iroquois, and if the followers of Gaiwiiio are better religious adherents than Christians, then of course whites (and possibly others) continue to kill Christ when they “do wickedly” if we understand that wickedness in social and political terms rather than the individual and moralistic terms in which Swayne probably meant to be understood.

These four visions – of the Prison, the Church, George Washington and Jesus/Segahedus – thus constitute a complete rejection of simple assimilation of the Seneca into Euro-American culture. Christ-killing in particular has resonances with the rhetorical strategies of other Seneca, such as Cornplanter and Red Jacket, in dealing with missionaries and other representatives of Euro-American religion. This being said, all four visions are part of a cohesive rhetorical strategy on the part of Handsome Lake and the Four Messengers to address the assimilationist pressures being brought to bear on the Seneca by the Friends at Jenuchshadago and by a wider range of individuals and institutions throughout western New York. It appears that that strategy largely rested on the premise that the best defense is a good offense. As we have just seen, Handsome Lake's visions attacked some of the most important institutions of Euro-American settler culture and in downgrading the status of two of that culture's most important figureheads, putting them at the service of Handsome Lake's agenda. In the process, the Gaiwiiio cleared away a space in which an independent articulation of Seneca culture could be voiced and in which the continued existence of the Seneca as a separate national entity could be imagined.

REASSERTING SENECA TRADITIONS

This reimagination occurred largely through the use of ritual practices that reasserted the Seneca's narrative about themselves. It is important to note that, at least in the opinion of the Quakers who observed the very beginning of Handsome Lake's ministry, ritual practices were at the very core of his

teaching. Jackson records that Handsome Lake's visions included “such things as the Great Spirit designed should be imparted to the Indians – that they must all quit drinking whiskey and other strong liquors – that they must revive the custom of their forefathers in eating a dog's flesh, and performing frequent dances – performing their religious ceremonies &c.”²⁰ The central place of ritual in the Code of Handsome Lake must be placed in the context of contested cultural identity that we have been looking at in this chapter. We have already seen how some of Handsome Lake's visions downgraded the status of white culture. We shall now examine how these go hand in hand with other visions which, conversely, magnify the value of Seneca culture. As a whole, the Gaiwiiio clears away space on the one hand, and fills it with a uniquely Seneca voice on the other.

Handsome Lake's Sky Journey gave a new level of depth to several of the traditional rites of the Seneca nation. The White Dog ceremony is singled out as particularly important during the prophet's vision of the heaven road. The Dog that he had himself sacrificed at least year's Hadidji'yontwus [new year's] ceremony meets him and his companions on the heaven road, wags his tail and springs on his former master in recognition. One of the messengers tells Handsome Lake that, “this thing attests to the value of our thank offering to the Creator.”²¹ The Messengers also introduce Joi'ise, a “faithful and good” man who “passed away to the lands of the creator” where his eternal reward is to call the people of the Creator's land to perform the Great Feather Dance.²² In placing both of these rites on the Heaven Road, the vision makes them more than simple divinely ordained rituals. They are a link between the country of the creator and the country of the Seneca, a sign of the Great Ruler's continued care for “his own people” even as both the heavenly and earthly domains of the Seneca are under threat from the United States. The vision appears to have had a powerful effect on the people, who, according to Halliday Jackson,

20 Jackson, “On the Civilization of the Indian Natives,” 42.

21 Parker, 75.

22 *ibid*, 76.

celebrated the White Dog Ceremony almost immediately after the Sky Journey.²³

It is important to remember that, at this time, the continuity of Seneca religious and cultural traditions was not an uncontested reality. By definition, most missionaries other than the Quakers actively sought the abolition of Seneca religious traditions in favor of Christianity. While, as we have already seen, the Quaker agenda focused more on assimilation than conversion, we cannot forget the links between the two that the Seneca themselves would have made, given the context of other missionary agendas. In an address to a Seneca national council at Buffalo Creek in 1805, Massachusetts Missionary Society representative Thomas Cram made remarks that are, unfortunately, representative of the attitudes of most missionaries.

There is but one way to serve God, and if you do not embrace the right way, you cannot be happy hereafter. You have never worshipped the Great Spirit in a manner acceptable to him; but have all your lives been in great errors and darkness. To endeavor to remove these errors, and open your eyes, that you might see clearly, is my business with you.²⁴

It is important to reiterate that one of the strengths of the Quakers was that they did not engage in this kind of aggressive missionization. However, this does not mean that there were not sometimes religious tensions. We can see these at work in a careful reading of the Quakers' missionary records. Jackson, for example, reports that, upon visiting the Cataraugus reserve in the Spring of 1802, the Friends were addressed by Waun'dun'gh'tah, the “chief warrior” of the community, who told them that “you have come at a time which has by us been set apart for performing worship to the Good Spirit, after our ancient customs. It is our way of worship, and, to us, solemn and serious, and not to be made light of, however different it may be from your mode.” While Jackson does not provide any explicit explanation for this greeting, clearly there has been some kind of tension to which the Cataraugus Seneca are responding.

²³ Jackson's Journal II, 348.

²⁴ Densmore, 136.

Whether or not this tension stemmed from any act or intention on the part of the Friends is not really relevant. What is relevant is that Handsome Lake and the Four Messengers were responding to a very real threat to the continuity of Seneca ritual practice and one which, even if it was out of their control, the Quakers were sometimes seen to be implicated in.

EDUCATION

We have seen how the Gaiwiiio sharply criticizes the core elements of white culture – the Church and the State. We have seen how this creates space for the reassertion of Seneca rituals and traditions. We have seen how all of this took place in a context of more aggressive missionaries to whom the Quakers were connected even if they differed in strategy and considered each other rivals. The same dynamic – the creation of space through criticism and the insertion of a renewed Seneca voice in to this vacuum – is also at play in the realm of education, one which is intimately connected to issues of ritual.

In Parker's version of the Code, the section dealing with agricultural practices is immediately followed by one concerning English language education. The Gaiwiiio commands that “the council appoint twelve people to study, two from each nation of the six. So many white people are about you that you must study to know their ways.”²⁵ Although this section is one of the shorter ones in the entire code, it is of massive political significance. One of the Quakers' main projects at Allegheny was the education of native children in reading and writing and this resulted in numerous controversies. The initiative started early in the Quaker mission to Allegheny, in the summer of 1799, a schoolhouse was constructed and Henry Simmons was “stationed there, [continuing] through the summer, instructing the children and otherwise affording aid and council to the Indians.” Given that the other Friends lived several miles up the Allegheny river, just outside of Jenuchshadago, Simmons role was not merely the instruction of

25 Parker, 38.

children but to be an overall adviser on economic and social policy in the village. “Education” of children and adults was of a piece and was really more akin to managing a social transformation for Senecas of all age groups.

Needless to say, the Friends were deeply perturbed by Handsome Lake's teachings on education. The Quaker records suggest to us that the eventual allowance for a few children to become literate in English was a concession and that his original council on the matter, given in 1801, was “recommending them to follow their old customs and not allow their children to learn to read and write.” Moreover, there is evidence that his teachings were at least somewhat effective. While there is no explicit reference to the failure of the educational project, Quaker records from two years after Handsome Lake's initial preaching on the matter show that the school was still closed, since the Friends had to “again open the business respecting the schooling of the children, which had for sometime been impeded by the system of Cannendiu [Handsome Lake].”²⁶ The council, Jackson reports, responded with seeming eagerness but also did not deal with the matter at all, saying that they would “let the Friends know when they were ready.”²⁷ In other words, “don't call us, we'll call you.”

This turn of events appears all the more significant when compared with the tone of Cornplanter's original letter inviting the Friends to send missionaries among the Seneca. The text specifically mentions the Seneca's desire that Seneca children “be taught to read and write, and such other things as you teach your children, especially the love of peace.”²⁸ While it will be noted that Cornplanter is far less likely to have desired that Seneca children learn Quaker pacifism than English literacy, there is little doubt as to the desire for some kind of educational project. This is a far cry from Handsome Lake's later stance on the issue and demonstrates just how much the Friends' difficulties really were due to his influence.

26 Jackson, “On the Civilization of the Indian Natives,” 45.

27 *Ibid*, 45.

28 *Ibid*, 10.

In resisting the Friends' education project, Handsome Lake may have been deferring to the wishes of Seneca outside of Cornplanter's ruling inner circle. While Cornplanter's letter indicates that the leadership of the Allegheny Seneca were enthusiastic about the promotion of English literacy at Jenuchshadago, there is evidence from Jackson's records that this attitude was not shared by ordinary Seneca parents. He indicates that attendance at the Quaker school was always low – never reaching twenty children even during the height of its operation – as well as inconsistent. He attributes this fact to the “little control” that parents had over their children.²⁹ While Seneca parents did nothing to prevent their children from attending the Friends' school, it does not appear that they did anything to promote it either. While Jackson attributes this to bad parenting – as white authority figures have interpreted resistance to public education among indigenous communities for hundreds of years – it is safe for us to assume that this is not the case. Rather, it would be more likely to conclude that Seneca parents simply had no interest in imposing literacy on their children. When the school was later closed and the council did nothing to have it reopened, it appears that the opinions of ordinary Seneca about education were finally being expressed by their leadership. Handsome Lake's visions were instrumental in that process. Jackson lists, among his principle teachings which he considered to be “very inimical to the concern in which the Friends were engaged,” that the Seneca should “follow their old customs” and “not allow their children to learn to read and write.”³⁰ This was a natural response to the pressures of assimilation in a context where religious conversion and primary education – ritual and pedagogy – were inherently linked.

That link would have been an obvious one for Handsome Lake to make, even at this time. In 1801, the year that Jackson recorded these difficulties, the only missionary engaged in active proselytization on Seneca territory was Elkanah Holmes, a Baptist whose major initiative was to lobby

²⁹ *Ibid*, 34.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 43.

the leadership of the Buffalo Creek reservation for permission to construct a schoolhouse there. In 1803, when Holmes' request was finally granted, it caused a serious rift between Handsome Lake and the leadership of the Buffalo Creek community, particularly Red Jacket with whom, as mentioned in previous chapters, he had already had a serious political falling out.³¹ Baptist missionary Lemuel Covell reports

the opposition of a part of the [Seneca] nation, headed by a certain influential *chief* by the name of OBAIL [Cornplanter], and a brother of his, who pretends to be a prophet [Handsome Lake], against the building of the [school] house, receiving any books from the white people for the instruction of their children, or harkening to the Gospel and the maxims of civilization.³²

Clearly it was not only Handsome Lake who drew a link between Education and Christian Conversion and not only the Quakers who attested to his opposition to both. Since ritual and pedagogy were linked, Handsome Lake's opposition to English education can be seen as the same kind of space-clearing that defined the visions of the two strong houses, of Washington and of Jesus/Se'ga'he'dus. His opposition to Church and State was of a piece with his opposition to the Bible and the Schoolhouse.

Education was also an essential component of the Presbyterian mission among the Oneida, led by Samuel Kirkland, who had severely criticized the Quakers for not being aggressive enough in seeking indigenous conversion to Christianity. Kirkland is said to have referred to those Oneida who supported Quaker missionaries as “a few sly, artful pagans & half-way Christians...some of the vilest & most useless characters even harpys among the nation.”³³ In spite of the fact that there is no evidence that the Friends ever used education as a means of proselytizing the Seneca, it would be easy to make the connection between religious conversion and English education in this context, when the links between the two would later serve as a foundation stone of colonial policy in North America.

31 Granville Ganter, ed., *The Collected Speeches of Sagoyewatha or Red Jacket* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 129.

32 *Ibid*, 129.

33 Karim M Tiro, “We Wish to Do You Good: The Quaker Mission to the Oneida Nation, 1790-1840” in *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Fall, 2006), 361.

THE “OLD WAY OF HANDSOME LAKE”

In place of white education, which Handsome Lake denounced, the Gaiwiio prescribed a number of rituals that functioned to constantly reinforce the Four Messengers' teachings. In particular, even during his life, Handsome Lake promoted regular meetings for the “instruction” of all the people in the teachings of the Four Messengers. Indeed, the Four Messengers seem to have thought it so important that people attend these meetings that they attributed truancy to spiritual forces working against the community. The Messengers told Handsome Lake that “the evil spirit will hinder you in all good things, but you can outwit him by doing all the things that he does not want you to do. Go to the meetings.”³⁴ It is clear that these meetings went beyond our usual sense of ritual/symbolic value. They were a religiously-derived form of community education quite similar to that used by the missionaries themselves and therefore probably intended to counter them.

While, in our nominally secular context, we might interpret this as a “purely religious” observance, the links between religious conversion and education outlined above ought to make us reconsider. Rather than comparing Handsome Lake to a contemporary minister urging his flock to attend Church more often, we might do better to think of him in the same way that we do Jacob Cram, Samuel Kirkland or Elkanah Holmes – as someone who was promoting religious participation as an essential piece of the wholesale conversion of an entire society. These were the people whom Handsome Lake was countering. It is logical to compare their methods. If education and conversion were often – thought not always – one and the same for the missionaries, and if Handsome Lake rejected them as one, it is logical to argue that, in his reassertions of Seneca identity they also functioned together.

The main difference between Handsome Lake and the missionaries is that, instead of promoting

³⁴ Parker, 42.

the “conversion” of his people to Euro-American ways of life, Handsome Lake was calling on them to retain their independent identity even as they adapted certain material and spiritual technologies from the whites. Thus the set of teachings and practices that eventually became known as the “Old Way of Handsome Lake” became an essential tool of imagination for the independent survival of the Seneca. Three components of this system served a distinctly pedagogical function: the practice of confession, the enforcement of religious conformity and the annual recitation of the Gaiwiiio.

Handsome Lake initiated a program of confession to reintegrate wayward individuals back into Seneca society – specifically, back into the Seneca society that he and the Four Messengers had helped the Seneca to imagine. This system was first instituted for repentant witches, but was later expanded to include all penitents. There were three types of confession that the Code of Handsome Lake provides for. The first of these, for the most minor of offenses, was public confession at a meeting of the whole people. The second was individual confession. The third, for those who had sinned most severely, was solitary confession, made directly to the Creator alone.³⁵ Whenever, throughout the punishment section of the Sky Journey discourse, the Four Messengers referred to “those who do not repent,” they were referring not only to those who had gotten drunk, practiced witchcraft, etc., but those who had done these things without going through the ritual of confession. While punishment – including capital punishment – was sometimes meted out on the wicked by Handsome Lake's followers, the structure of confession served more of an educational purpose than a disciplinary one.

Confession served as a distinctly pedagogical tool because it was associated with specific instances of wrongdoing and with specific people. It was the front line of embodied defense against the transgression of the norms that the Four Messengers had set. As such, it served to reify these norms. For

³⁵ *Ibid*, 36.

example, Matthew Denis notes that the institution of confession was instrumental in promoting new, feminized images of what witchcraft looked like. Even though relatively few women were ever executed (at least as far as we know from the limited documentary record), the increasing numbers of women who publicly confessed to witchcraft helped change the way that the Seneca thought about it.³⁶ There is a very strong case to be made for the same function being played by confessions of drunkenness and other practices contrary to the Gaiwiiio.

Another way that religious pedagogy served the purpose of reimagining Seneca national life was through the expectation that every Seneca would follow the teachings of Handsome Lake and the Four Messengers. Handsome Lake was told that “the religious leaders and the chiefs must enforce obedience to the teachings of Gaiwiiio.”³⁷ While the later division of the Seneca into those who were more or less resistant or attracted to aspects of Christianity (over-simply described by missionaries of the day as “Christian” and “Pagan” Seneca) would make the total implementation of this commandment impossible, it is clear that the Four Messengers did not intend adherence to the Gaiwiiio to be a matter of individual choice. Rather, they were laying out a way of life that would apply to an entire society. Since that way of life was distinct from that of the settler communities that were surrounding the Seneca, it also contributed towards the imagination of the Seneca as a distinct society rather than a group that was being “civilized” or assimilated. Moreover, since, as we have already seen, the Gaiwiiio prescribed the continuation of all the central rituals and practices of Seneca tradition, the idea of religious conformity meant a total resistance to cultural or religious assimilation.

The final element in this system of imagination would not be completely integrated until well after Handsome Lake's death in 1815: the annual recitation of the entire Gaiwiiio as part of the Green Corn

³⁶ Denis, 100.

³⁷ Parker, 76.

ceremony held in the fall. This development of this institution started in about 1825 when, according to tradition, the faith-keepers at Tonawanda, the last place that Handsome Lake lived before his death, became concerned that “the Old Way of Handsome Lake” was giving way to Christianity. In order to preserve these teachings and prevent backsliding, the women asked Jimmy Johnson, a “grandson”³⁸ of Handsome Lake and chief of the Tonawanda community to recite the words of the Code.³⁹ As this practice grew in popularity, it spread to other reserves and, by the end of the 1840s was a regular part of the life of Seneca and other Iroquois communities. A standard version of the code became a part of the oral history of Six Nations communities and a regular cycle of recitation developed, in which the Code was recited every year at Tonawanda and every two years at other reservations.⁴⁰

The annual recitation of the Gaiwiiio started during a period when the Seneca were beginning to be seriously divided over what, if any, relationship their communities would have to Christianity. The relatively pluralist Quaker mission ended in 1830 and, even before this, more aggressive missionaries had started to make serious inroads into Seneca communities. While, in 1805 and 1811, however divided it may have been about the admittance of schoolteachers, the national council of the Seneca had been firm in rejecting outright missionaries. In 1819, however, a group of Seneca who had converted to Christianity invited the New York Missionary Society to send a preacher. As if to confirm Handsome Lake's fears about the links between education and religious conversion, the man for the job was Jabez Hyde, who had been a schoolteacher in Buffalo Creek before becoming a missionary. In the height of irony, Red Jacket, whom Handsome Lake had accused of being too compromising with regard to both land and education would end up leading the militantly anti-Christian faction of the Seneca nation just a year after his former

38 We do not know whether this familial tie was literal.

39 Elisabeth Tooker, “On the Development of the Handsome Lake Religion” in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* Vol. 133, No. 1 (March 1989), 37.

40 Denis, 110.

political opponent had died.⁴¹

The period of the “revival” of Handsome Lake's teachings also coincided with renewed threats to the territorial integrity of the Seneca nation. Immediately before the War of 1812 the right to purchase Seneca land was bought by the Ogden Land company, which invested over \$90,000 in the effort to alienate Seneca land. While the war temporarily suspended these efforts, the establishment of a stable border with British Canada and the construction of the Erie Canal would make the company's investment all the more valuable and lead to the redoubling of efforts to at least pressure the Seneca into selling most of their land and ideally to dispossess and displace them entirely.⁴²

In short, the late 1810s and early 1820s saw the rise of both cultural and economic pressures that threatened the very existence of the Seneca nation. Like two pincers of a giant scorpion, missionaries and land agents closed in on the Seneca and other Six Nations communities with a view to their cultural and territorial annihilation. Elsewhere in the American Republic, these pressures had already resulted in the complete displacement of the Delawares and would soon affect the Cherokee in a similar way.

We cannot overestimate the significance of the fact that, faced with these pressures, the faith-keepers at Tonawanda and others throughout the Six Nations would turn to the Gaiwiiio of Handsome Lake and the Four Messengers as an essential tool for keeping alive the imagination of themselves as a people. As we have reviewed in previous chapters, Handsome Lake helped navigate the complex adaptation of settler ideas about addiction, territory, property, agricultural labor, domesticity, family makeup and much more. But one thing that Handsome Lake and his followers refused to compromise on was the right to continued existence of a Seneca nation that was both present in the land and independent from the newcomers who had settled on it. “You have the constant fear that the white race will wipe you

41 Densmore, 92.

42 Denis 183-184.

out,” the Four Messengers told him, but “the Creator will care for his real people.”⁴³ In the next few decades, partially through his teachings, maintained by faithful servants of the Good Spirit, Handsome Lake's prediction was vindicated. The Creator did indeed care for his real people. Indeed, he is caring for them still.

43 Bruchac, ed., *The Good Message of Handsome Lake*, 33.

CONCLUSION

The “Old Way of Handsome Lake” is still practiced on Seneca and other Six Nations reservations throughout New York and at times has even extended to Canada. Every year, the faith-keepers at Tonawanda send for an officiant to recite the Gaiwiiio, just as they did in the 1820s, when Jimmy Jemson was first pressed to recite his grandfather's code. A string of wampum, passed down from generation to generation, is sent by messenger from Tonawanda to other reservations, inviting Seneca and other Six Nations delegations to come and hear the Code preached.¹

The recitation takes place at the Green Corn ceremony every fall and, although this ceremony had existed for hundreds of years before Handsome Lake was born, it is now associated with the annual renewal of his teachings. The Code is recited over the course of four days. Recitation occurs only in the morning, with the afternoon filled with other ceremonies. At the end, everyone present thanks the officiant and returns to their own communities. Over the next several months, the Code is recited again on other reservations. Every reservation other than Tonawanda hears the Code every two years. It is preached at Tonawanda yearly.²

If historical pattern holds true, the Code of Handsome Lake is preached wherever and whenever the Seneca and other Six Nations are spiritually, economically or culturally threatened (and these threats often go together). It was revived for the first time during Handsome Lake's own life, between the War of 1812 and his death in 1815. In 1806 Handsome Lake was forced to relocate to the village of Cold Spring, a far smaller and less politically important settlement than Jenuchshadago. Historians are not certain of the exact reason for this, though there are some hints in the oral traditions of the Seneca. Some record a power struggle between Handsome Lake and Cornplanter. Others say that Handsome Lake was

1 Anthony Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Vintage Press, 1972), 5.

2 *Ibid*, 6.

“tempted” to engage in sexual relations with a much younger woman who was the daughter of a visiting chief and that he left both as penance and to prevent a political conflict. Still others say that, in a grand irony, a man who fiercely condemned witchcraft was accused of this crime himself.

Regardless of the reason, Handsome Lake was politically marginalized by this move and his teachings were not preached anywhere else in the Nation. There is evidence that this exile was deeply painful for Handsome Lake since, just before his death in 1815, it is recorded that he experienced deep despondency at his inability to return home. But, in 1812, when renewed war between Britain and America once again brought military action to the Six Nations' homelands, Handsome Lake was called to preach at Tonawanda. His teachings were once again popular not only with the Seneca but also among the neighboring Onondaga. Indeed, at the time of his death, Handsome Lake was on Onondaga territory at the invitation of that community to preach to them.³

The Gaiwiiio was transformed into the “Old Way of Handsome Lake” in the context of two more threats to Seneca independence on their own territory, in the 1820s and 1840s. The first of these occurred when the Ogden land company was investing millions of today's dollars in lobbying the government for their removal. The second came after some Seneca agreed to relocate to the west in 1838 and the rest split between the Tonawanda Community (now the Tonawanda Band of Seneca Indians) and the rest of the nation (now the Seneca Nation of Indians) over issues of government. This revival was mainly the concern of faithful women, who were entrusted with both the physical and the spiritual cultivation and care of Seneca lands. The Gaiwiiio's utility as a spiritual and political technology to protect the land was apparently so powerful that it even allowed for the deprioritization of its more misogynistic elements, which were gradually counteracted as the “Old Way of Handsome Lake” came to depend more and more

3 Matthew Denis, *Seneca Possessed* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 109.

upon the leadership of women.⁴

The historical issues to which the Gaiwiio was tied at the time of its creation and subsequent revivals are still prescient. Alcoholism and other forms of substance abuse remain rampant in Seneca communities, as it does among indigenous people across North America. Although precise numbers are hard to come by, all reports indicate that alcoholism is still a major problem on Seneca reservations. Moreover, studies done by the US government on indigenous Americans generally indicate that alcoholism is, on average, seven times more prevalent in aboriginal communities than in non-aboriginal ones. Interestingly enough, the Seneca experience these problems in spite of having prospered economically by way of several lucrative business interests, including gasoline and cigarette companies and a casino.⁵

The intersections between patriarchy and colonialism also remain of considerable interest. Histories such as that of the Seneca are receiving renewed attention from scholars precisely because they speak to the ways in which gendered oppression is racialized. Contemporary feminism is still wrestling with the challenges posed to it by scholars such as Andrea Smith and Jessica Yee to take into account the ways in which the oppression of women is not a universal phenomenon, but one that Euro-American settlers brought with them and imposed on indigenous communities.⁶⁷ We can see very clearly in the interactions between Quaker men and Seneca women brought up in Chapter Two the ways in which gender is often contested along racial and colonial lines. It is particularly important to note that the issue of female economy is also a live one for the Seneca. As the nation's economy shifted towards diversified businesses and services in the 1980s and 1990s, it left behind areas that were traditionally reserved for

4 *Ibid*, 110.

5 Dan Herbek, "Seneca Nation: Specter of Alcoholism Still Pervades Tribal History" in *Nat News*, 05/18/2004, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NatNews/message/34107>

6 See Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005)

7 See Jessica Yee, *Feminism for Real: Deconstructing the Academic Industrial Complex of Feminism* (Toronto: Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, 2011)

women which were the source of their authority, namely agriculture.

Finally, the pressures of cultural assimilation are just as strong for indigenous peoples across North America today as they were for the Seneca at the turn of the nineteenth century. It is not to be underestimated that, after the removal of some Seneca to the western US, most of the nation choose to adopt a liberal-democratic constitution to replace traditional governance. At this time, it was only the community at Tonawanda, where a revival of Handsome Lake's teachings was occurring in the 1840s, that kept a traditional model of government. Today, Tonawanda continues to be both the center of the “Old Way of Handsome Lake” and a bastion of traditional government that still has not joined the Seneca Nation of Indians.⁸

It is interesting to note that, in spite of its relative success in the realm of business, the Seneca Nation's current relationship with the State of New York is marked by conflict over its own economic independence. In 1990 and 1996 it filed land claims – the first relating to lands leased to the State for 99 years from 1890 whose boundaries were disputed and the second having to do with Grand Island and other lands on the Niagara river that it claimed it was entitled to under the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua. The former dispute was resolved by an act of the state legislature. The second went to court where both the District and Appeals courts ruled against the Seneca. In 2006 the US Supreme Court refused to hear the case, cutting off channels for further legal action. Most recently, in 2007, the Seneca revoked an agreement with the State of New York having to do with a thruway running across the Cattaraugus Reservation in retaliation for attempts by the state to tax Seneca businesses. The final dispute is still ongoing.⁹

The spiritual, cultural and economic value of land – what land says about Seneca sovereignty as

⁸ Denis, 216.

⁹ Christopher Smith, "Seneca Nation To New York State: Bring It On", Buffalo Geek Blog, 14 Jan 2009.

well as its role in Seneca economy – is still a live issue for the Seneca nation, as for other indigenous nations throughout North America. As we have seen, land was also at the center of what Handsome Lake said, not only about addiction, but also about gender and, to a lesser extent, about national identity. He condemned land sales because they violated the Seneca's sacred birthright. He supported women who fought for their right to farm for the same reason. He also fought for a unique sort of educational and religious system because it could maintain these sacred beliefs. Insofar as all of these themes continue to run through Seneca-New York relations, as well as indigenous movements for decolonization across North America, Handsome Lake's teachings, and our examination of them as historians, remain relevant.

Thus it is useful to note, as we did in our first chapter, that Handsome Lake positioned the goal of sobriety not within the Quakers' agenda of Seneca rural capitalism and free-holding land title, but within the preservation of the Sacred economy of female farming and male hunting. Prosperity, for Handsome Lake, was useless if it came through “the ways of the white man.” As noted at the end of the third chapter above, many of Handsome Lake’s teachings were vindicated over time. His confidence in Seneca persistence and unwavering belief that they were “the creator’s real people” in spite of their subaltern position within the new United States, his criticism for the process of “civilization” counseled by the Quakers and his determination that the Seneca had a (literally) divinely-ordained right to live independently on their own territory remain vital and relevant ideas almost two centuries after his death. That his Code continues to be preached on reservations throughout Seneca territory is neither surprising nor unimportant. Rather, it is an important means and a sure sign of continued agency and resistance, even under colonial conditions, by the Seneca people.

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