

THE ONEIDAS

JULIA K. BLOOMFIELD
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The book is addressed to the Oneidas and their many loyal friends of the past as well as the present and in memory of Bishop Kemper who so ardently desired their history written, also to Rev. F. Merrill, for ten years Missionary among the Oneidas, who again urged and inspired the writing, this work is most affectionately dedicated by the author.

PREFACE

In the preface of the book Ms. Bloomfield indicated three great difficulties she encountered in writing the book; advanced years, confirmed invalidism, and the inability to go to a library to look up records of the Oneidas. She goes on to mention the reference materials she used which includes the following:

The Legend of the Iroquois, Lewis H. Morgan
Life of Joseph Brant, Col Stone
Onondaga, Clarke
Old New York Frontier, Halsey
The Mohawk Valley, W. Max Reid (these were illustrations)
The People of the Stone, Rev. Merrill
The Living Church, Susan Fenimore Cooper

I was unable to find any information on the author. My hunch is she was a close friend of Rev. Merrill and probably affiliated with the Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church has been a major influence on the history of the Oneidas in Wisconsin, beginning as early as the 1700's with the effort to Christianize them.

Interestingly enough Clarke in his book, Onondaga, writes about their belief in a Supreme Being, and I quote, "The Indians of the League can at no time have been called Heathens, so far certainly ^{at} the term applied to foreign races, without the slightest idea of a Creator, mere worshipers of idols, graven images of wood and stone, For at all times we find they had a belief in a Great Spirit, the Creator of all things - - in the language of the Onondaga through interpretation, 'Creator of the world, the Holder of the Heavens, the Master of Breath, the Maker of men and animals'".

Halsy in his writings states, "Sovereign they were and the only accountability they acknowledge was to the Great Spirit".

In the first portion of the book is a historical overview of the Six Nations, with a geographical description of the land occupied by the Oneidas in New York, as describe by Clarke, who also supplies some information on the importance of the water routes. The closeness of the Oneida and the Onondaga and I quote, "were for years living as one".

References are made to the Clan system, the matrilineal structure, the major ceremonies (with some analysis and analogies), description of wampum and its use, the significance of the principal council fire at Onondaga, which so long held was put out at Albany in 1775.

An explanation of how the League functioned, dividing the councils into three distinct characters: civil, religious, and mourning.

Some information on the dislike held for the French because of the assistance the French provided to Iroquois enemies; Huron, Adirondacks, and Algonquins. Because of this the French Jesuits, (a major religious movement) were hampered in their efforts to Christianize the Six Nations People, however some of the first writings are produced and one can find them in the Jesuit Missionary Documents (located in the Oneida Community Library). Would like to state that even though the writings come from a particular slant (paternalistic) there is excellent information on the observations of various aspects of Iroquois life.

The French and Indian Wars are mentioned and background on Sir William Johnson, a major player in Iroquois history, as he was appointed War Superintendent by the British Crown. When war clouds gathered between the British and the Colonists, Johnson urged the Six Nations to remain neutral. His defendants would change that picture and encouraged the Iroquois to fight in behalf of the British.

The Church of England had initiated efforts as early as 1700 to counteract the Jesuits influence by developing their own missionaries to the Iroquois. Eventually, a gentleman by the name of Samuel Kirkland would impact the Oneidas and convert a majority to Christianity. The close friendship that develops between Kirkland and Chief Skenandoah is covered. There is an excellent book on this in the Journals of Samuel Kirkland (which can also be borrowed from the Oneida Community Library). I believe this relationship was one of the main reasons, and there were others, that the Oneida chose to side with the Colonists in the Revolutionary War.

One of the quotes of Skenadoah, who had come in contact with the White Man's "fire water" and woke up to find all of his chieftain ornaments and most of his close gone, vowed never to drink it again (which he never did for the next sixty years that he lived). The quote comes when Skenadoah, up in years and trying to encourage abstinence says, "Drink no 'strong water' it makes you mice for the white men who are like cats. Many a meal they have eaten of you".

Kirkland's influence establishes a school for Indians, eventually developing in what today is Hamilton College, located in Clinton, New York, and on the grounds in a small cemetery rests Chief Skenadoah and Samuel Kirkland, friends throughout their lives and shapers of Oneida history, as well as future.

As mentioned earlier, the controversy within the Confederacy, because of the approaching Revolutionary War, is covered to some degree, there are books covering this subject also, one that I am familiar with is written by Barbara Graymont, The Iroquois in the American Revolution.

There is a rather lengthy section on Eleazer Williams, the appointed religious leader from the Episcopal Church, who initiates the move to Wisconsin in 1822. Information on the talk of the time which alluded to the possibility that Mr. Williams was the lost Dauphin of France..

The chronology of the priests and bishops who work with the Oneidas is very well documented, and to some degree the history of the Episcopal Church in initially Wisconsin Territory through to the current situation.

The section that I appreciate the most deals with the diary of Ellen Goodnaugh. Reverend Goodnaugh and his wife who was seventeen years old at the time, came to the Duck Creek Mission in 1853. Her diary's start date is June 2, 1866, which makes her approximately 30 years old.

Her diary is filled with all types of information. Her children (all five) were given Oneida names, and she mentions her efforts at trying to learn the language while her children speak it better than English. The Oneida language is mentioned throughout the book and appears to be the predominant language right up to 1898, because they give names of the various interpreters in the church.

Ellen gives us some of the background of fields her husband worked in, picking up and delivering mail, teacher, doctor, and correspondent to the government.

She gives us glimpses of some of the community people, especially the women: what they wore, the making of traditional corn bread, making of corn husk mats, mattresses, dolls, Thursday Womens Guild, which still continues today. She also mentions having seen the "witch light" the night before, and stories shared with her about witchcraft, especially the shape shifters (people who can change themselves into animals). These are stories I heard from some of my grandparents.

Music was an intricate part of their worship and she writes of it several times, she is deeply affected by it. The Te Deum is mentioned as being sung only for the Bishop's visit and Christmas. The

Church is described, the efforts by priest, bishop and people to build a new one. The closeness and strong friendship the Oneidas have for their Bishop (Kemper at this particular time).

Goodnaugh She writes several times of the Oneidas meeting in Council, and the headmen asking Rev. Burleson to intercede on their behalf as some of the Green Bay men, the Indian agent and a opposing factions of the Oneidas want to sell the reservation land and move the Oneida further west. Cornelius Hill is identified and his quotes are inspiring. Rev. Burleson does write to the Indian department requesting why the Oneidas can't cut their own timber, which is what the Indian agent has said, threatening to bring soldiers onto the reservation if necessary. Eventually the agent is replaced.

Chief Cornelius Hill's association with Holy Apostles Church and his standing in the community are covered, also the information that he is from the Bear Clan.

Apparently Ellen had also begun to write to various church leaders and other women to solicit help for the church and the Oneidas. She writes about the crops failing, smallpox epidemic, the great fire which destroyed a large amount of the timber on the reservation.

There are names of individuals, such as Mary Ann Bread, Margaret Skenadore and many others, with descriptions about that individual and what they were involved with.

Having read this the first time in the Newberry Library back in 1986 I'd forgotten the effect the diary had on me, I found the tears coming down again as I read about Ellen's death in 1875. Ellen, her husband Rev. Burleson and their children are buried on the hillside in our cemetery at Holy Apostles; she spent the major portion of her life living with the Oneida and I could feel from her diary the deep and abiding love she felt for them. Reverend Goodnaugh joined her in 1890.

Solomon Burleson became the next missionary to take over where Rev. Goodnaugh and his oldest son John left off. Rev. Burleson comes with a background in law and medicine. With a small grant from the government he is able to secure some medicine for the Oneidas, and initiated a drive to build a hospital. There were five sons, all became priests. Rev. Burleson and family are also resting among the Oneida in Holy Apostles cemetery.

The last part of the book covers many areas of Oneida History in short pieces;

The Methodist Church

The Catholic Church

The Oneida Hospital

The Oneida Boarding School

The Oneida Band

Individuals: Dr. Josiah Powless, Daniel Bread, Mary Ann Bread, Lavinia Cornelius (nurse)
Nancy Cornelius (nurse)

Sisters of the Holy Nativity (teachers)

Nelson Metoxen (blacksmith)

I strongly urge every Oneida to make the effort to read this book, it is full of information on our direct ancestors and speaks to the hardships that formed and shaped the community we have today.

Many thanks to the historians who have taken the time to research, write and publish the information they have found on our people, and thank heaven for those ancestors and friends who had the foresight to write down what was happening during their lifetime.

I also strongly urge those of you who have an interest to visit the cemetery of Holy Apostles, it contains the remains of our forefathers and shares our history in another fashion, as does the Methodist cemetery.

I believe the Church is the cradle of our culture here in Wisconsin and even though it may not be politically correct to say that I would challenge anyone to dispute it.

Judy Cornelius