

ONEIDA TERRITORIAL MEETING OF ALL ONEIDAS

August 4 and 5, 1979. On these days a meeting was hosted by the "traditional" Oneidas on the Oneida Territory in New York. This is the heart of the entire Oneida Nation both in land and heritage.

It was a historic event in several respects. This was the third such meeting; the first was at Onandaga in May, 1979, and the second was hosted by the Oneidas who live in Wisconsin in June 1979. At each meeting all Oneida persons were invited both individually and in a representative capacity. For years Oneidas have discussed such a meeting at which all Oneida groups would be there to represent their views on matters within our common interest. Many problems and barriers have prevented such a meeting, yet the determination many different Oneida people has been to continue seeking meetings of this nature, refusing to succumb to discouragements and frustrations. This meeting was the result of those combined efforts.

The Oneidas who live in Wisconsin sent people and Mr. Irving Chrisjohn and Roy Kennedy came from Canada for the elective system there. The Oneidas from Canada left Saturday evening, but while they were present they participated. The topic of the meeting has been land claims; however, and this is the historic part, the dynamics of these meetings has been to let us know one another, resulting in the development of trust that will be essential in the near and far future.

We are learning through experience that when we come together to discuss business sufficient time must be allowed (even planned) for everybody to be there and not someplace else in their minds and hearts. This phenomenon doesn't have to be labeled as "traditional" or anything. It is just plain common sense. First, we get together and after we're all here then we talk. That's the Oneida way and the Indian way - it is also the human way.

On Sunday Mr. "Chip" Burr and Mrs. Geraldine Thompson came from the New York Oneidas who govern themselves by an elective system. Then, Bruce Elijah, a sub-Chief of the Grand Council from Canada came. With these people, all Oneida groups had presented themselves. Admittedly, not all were present at the same time, yet a significant thing occurred: within a twelve hour period all Oneida governments, elective and traditional, showed up at the same place - on land that is indisputedly Oneida home land and the very center of our Oneida birthright. It may be criticized but all Oneidas must bear in mind that at no place else even this much ever occurred since the old days before we were forceably separated. It was imperfect, but it was real progress and those present were deeply encouraged.

At times the meeting was emotional, even critical, but these are not always negative, as the meeting proved. The larger good of the Oneida Nation was obviously the force that generated its success.

It was very emotional and went to the heartbeat of the Oneida people - that we will be activists in our survival, that the Oneida people are alive and well and are ONE NATION whose sovereignty is not and cannot be limited by any other nation or persons.

These meetings will continue to be held and all Oneidas should be present and participate and tell those who are unable to be physically present what transpires.

Respectfully submitted,

Jerry L. Hill