

Gannagaro

Stronghold of The Senecas



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Bicentennial Booklet
1976*

GANNAGARO

PROUD HERITAGE OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

The story of the center of the
Seneca Indian Nation
at
VICTOR, ONTARIO COUNTY,
NEW YORK

By Rosemary Robinson

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Any reporter knowing the star-crossed story of Gannagaro becomes a disciple.

We became a disciple ten years ago - seeing Gannagaro as a Camelot for the American Indian in a country where Camelots are hard to come by.

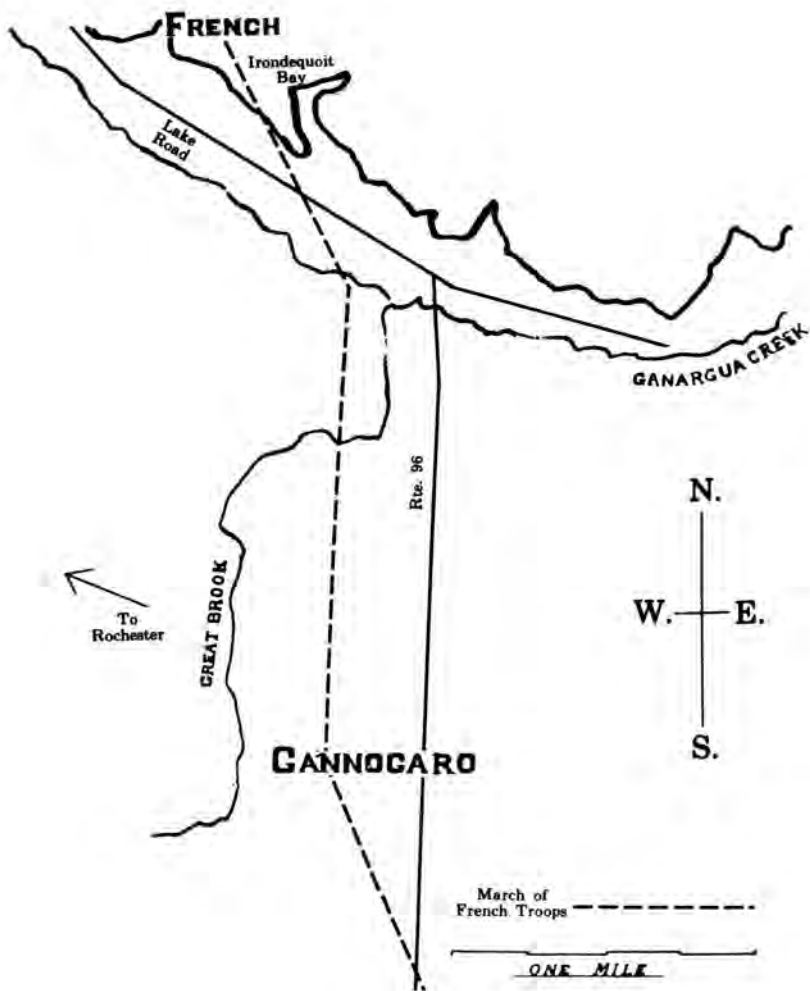
If this helps in any way, it's been worth every frustrating minute.

The continuity and force of this 17th century story would never have been possible without the renewed hope and enthusiasm of the League of the Iroquois -- substantiated by interviews with archaeologists and or historians like the late George Selden, J. Sheldon Fisher, Jane LeClair, and still others who recorded their accounts years ago.

The real heroes were the feisty Senecas who fought to the last ditch to protect their capital centuries ago, and the Jesuits, whose detailed accounts lay fallow in volumes of the "Jesuit Relations."

In the very real sense this is their book, not ours.

Rosemary Robinson



Introduction

As the nation observes its bicentennial, it is not necessary to observe that a major portion of historical interest and concern in Western New York should be directed at the Indian nation which populated this area in pre-Revolutionary days and here established a remarkable civilization.

We are especially proud of the work done on the Gannagaro project for many years by Rosemary Robinson of our editorial staff. She has been a central force in the development of the knowledge and interest which is making the Gannagaro restoration possible.

Although this great Indian metropolis has long since disappeared, it has held a constant position in the history of the American Indian.

And by studying Gannagaro, one begins to sense the remarkable characteristics of the Seneca nation, its governance, its admirable codes of individual conduct, its accomplishments, and the truly remarkable poetic and religious spirit which animated its civilization.

Thus Gannagaro is at the same time an historic site and a shrine of a civilization.

Fortunately some of the area of Gannagaro now has been rescued from possible desecration, but additional lands remain to be acquired. And there remains the great task of enabling this land to project in the most profound and dramatic manner the Seneca civilization.

One can envision a memorial development at Gannagaro becoming one of the most important centers for the study and appreciation of the human story of this continent.

This booklet is designed to detail the history and project an idea of the importance of Gannagaro.

Wolfe Publications, Inc., is happy to produce this booklet as part of its observance of the Bicentennial.

Andrew D. Wolfe,
Publisher

This booklet tells the history of Gannagaro, the stronghold in the 1600's of the Seneca Indians, which today is grassy farmland in the Town of Victor, about fifteen miles southeast of Rochester in Upstate New York.

The area now is listed as a National Historic Landmark, and 300 acres of the village site of approximately 1,000 acres have been purchased by the State of New York.

But still in the dream stage are plans to acquire the remainder of the site and to establish upon it a shrine, memorial, and museum area dedicated to the Seneca Indians, who there created what in its time was the largest Indian metropolis in North America.

It's doubtful if the Senecas were confronted with as many obstacles in creating their community as have since faced historians and archaeologists in attempting to re-establish it.

For years the effort remained completely a dream. The high land site of the village, known for more than a century as Boughton Hill, remained simply Boughton Hill. Eventually a small marker was placed at the site by a Jesuit priest, but there was nothing which prompted visualization of what once had existed there.

It was this situation which led former Ontario County Historian Sheldon Fisher years ago to request a study by the National Park Service.

At his request, Dr. John Cotter of the National Park Service spent considerable time studying early records, and artifacts. He called Boughton Hill "The most important Indian site in North America" as well as the best documented from the standpoint of Jesuit missionary

records. The Jesuits' "Relations," extensive records kept by the fearless missionaries, were of inestimable value in helping historians learn the ways of the various Indian nations. Copies of their records are available at St. John Fisher College and Rochester Public Library.

Cotter turned his opinions and findings over to the top advisory board of the Department of the Interior for the National Park Service with the recommendation that funds be allocated to rebuild it just as it was in the 1600's and maintain it as a national museum.

What Cotter, Fisher, and other historians and archaeologists hoped to see done was a repeat of the famous Huron Indian site in Canada (which, incidentally, originally was destroyed by the very Seneca who inhabited Boughton Hill). In accomplishing this, they felt, they would not only be reincarnating the most memorable site of a famous nation, but offering the young a chance to relive the country's history.

According to Fisher, who was an archaeologist prior to becoming Ontario County Historian, one of the benefits derived from the presence of a museum would be that the relics and artifacts could be housed under one roof and their story told.

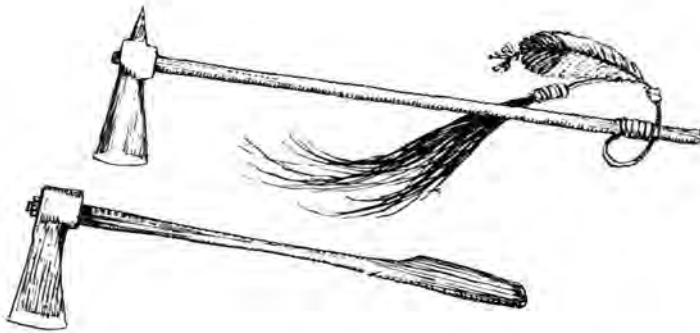
The immediate region is still "loaded with artifacts," some as deep as five feet in the soil, but they are in danger of being dug up as souvenirs and scattered all over the country.

Valuable Artifacts

Fisher mentioned one man in particular who made Boughton Hill and its buried treasure his hobby. He accumulated a collection that at the time of his death was put up for sale for \$35,000. These artifacts, Fisher feels, belong to the American people. There are many less ambitious collectors, some holding nothing more than a few arrow heads.

But if the finding happens to be more significant, its meaning and story can go undetected. On the other hand, if such a piece falls into the hands of a professional, it could help solve questions about Seneca life.

As a matter of fact, it was the uncontrolled dispersion



from Boughton Hill that led to the organization of the Genesee County or Morgan Chapter of the New York Archaeological Association.

The chapter has done everything possible to keep research systematic and under experienced control. Many members in this area have bent their efforts in the direction of tracing all valuable artifacts that might round out the Seneca story.

Let us now turn back to the National Park Service survey. It was two years before word came back from the advisory board of the Park Service. The word was encouraging and affirmative. The Park Service designated the area as an historic landmark. In order to commence rebuilding the famous town, however, cooperation was needed from those Victor residents owning portions of land known to be part of Gannagaro.

TV Serial

At this junction, the endeavor, which has gained the wide acclaim of historians, educators and archaeologists,

ran afoul of enough problems to keep a television serial running for a season.

Officials of the Town of Victor turned thumbs down on the grounds that it would draw too much traffic and undesirable crowds. While historians argued that "undesirable" elements were not generally attracted to educational sites, officials talked to the property owners and asked them to refuse consent to the project.

There were mixed feelings within the Town. Some residents agreed with the historians. Others backed the town officials, who further stated that the land could be better used for real estate development.

In the long run, many land owners refused their permission.

First mystified, then angry at the turning down of an important nationally significant site, historians located well beyond the bounds of the region have tried to keep the matter alive for the benefit of future generations by appealing to the state for funds.

Robert J. Graham, a Victor resident and a teacher in special education for the mentally retarded, has written and had published a book called "Ashes To The Wind."

Its characters are fictitious, but are based on facts scholars know concerning life in the famed Gannagaro. Included at the book's end is a factual account of the era and pictures of some of the relics collected.

Many of the latter are from Graham's own collection which is now on exhibit at St. John Fisher College.

Graham began studying the American Indian while he was still in his teens and learned a good deal from the late George B. Selden, Pittsford-Victor Rd., a Bushnell's Basin resident who was not only an authority on local Indian lore in general, but also on Denonville's march against the Seneca.

He's also worked and-or studied under the late Rev. Alexander M. Stewart, an authority on the Jesuit Missions; Charles F. Wray, archaeologist and Seneca scholar; and Dr. Clayton Mau, author and historian.

On his own, he's devised a filter which he used to detect small relics taken from Boughton Hill. Items such as

beads that would otherwise be overlooked, are found with its aid.

Graham has written about the historic village: "As the capital village of the mighty Seneca, the most powerful nation of the Iroquois, Gannagaro was so famous that it became known in the European capitals of the time."

Historians like Fisher, Graham and Selden have sought to prevent the history of this remarkable community from becoming myth or highly-colored fiction. They believe it vital for succeeding generations of Americans to have accurate knowledge of what in many ways was an advanced and fascinating civilization.

Historians are awed by Boughton Hill, Victor, and the uncommonly brave Seneca Indians who built their capital, Gannagaro, there over 300 years ago--a capital that historians say was visited by La Salle in quest of a native guide.

The Seneca, with four other tribes, made up the mighty League of the Iroquois, and their story is of particular interest to residents of this region, who walk where they once walked.

Whether Gannagaro is ever to be rebuilt as a national monument is a matter only time, effort and understanding can decide. If it materializes it would include 150 longhouses which gives some indication of the size of the once famous, ill-fated village.

If not, it's hoped historians and archaeologists can keep the authentic story of the Seneca alive for future generations, undiluted by fiction and-or prejudice.

Mighty Iroquois

To those visualizing the Seneca Indian as an unthinking savage, it comes as news that when the idea of a confederacy to preserve peace through strength was first presented, the five tribes who accepted it (Seneca, Mohawk,

Oneida, Onondaga and Cayuga) did so after careful consideration of what it meant.

According to Arthur Parker, who wrote the "Analytical History of the Seneca Indians," the Iroquois group differed from fellow Indians of the times. They weren't satisfied with the vegetable-like existence many of the latter accepted. They believed that as nations they should have some purpose higher than simply clinging to existence. From this nucleus of ideals they approached the League as a way of making their ideas and ideals work.

Unfortunately, because young braves had for so long worshiped war, it was possible to obtain peace only after thoroughly trouncing their enemies. But prior to this devastating and courageous endeavor the older men of the tribes had worked toward peace through understanding with the fervor of a red-skinned United Nations.

Parker says that when the Iroquois realized they'd have to remove all their enemies "in the living world" before they could hope for peace, they set out to do just that.

And in the doing they wrote a story across the country that Parker describes as "without parallel." (Facts for Parker's account, as for most historians, relate back to the Jesuit "Relations." These were records kept by the missionaries in the 1600's.)

The Seneca began their effort with the Huron, a tribe that had enlisted the aid of the French to help them. The latter lived to regret this alliance, since in pitting themselves against the Iroquois or more particularly the Seneca, they endangered their foothold in the New World.

But the French had no way of knowing at that stage that the Indian enemy they were making was to prove powerful enough to determine the shape of history.

Once the Iroquois decided that the Huron must go, they went into the fray with such a vengeance that one Frenchman wrote: "My pen has no ink black enough to describe the fury of the Iroquois."

Historians later learned it was more than just fury. The well-disciplined Iroquois had realized that peace was out of the question and set out methodically to wipe out their enemies. When they finished, the once-powerful Huron tribe passed out of existence altogether.

Juggernaut

Next, Parker writes, came the Neutrals, whom the Seneca scattered or adopted. This adoption of the enemy was put to good use by the Seneca. It was a way for the enemy to save himself. Once he'd proven his loyalty to his new tribe, he was trusted and officially adopted. The Seneca even had a city for this purpose called "Gandougarae," a spot located near East Bloomfield and known, at least when Parker was writing, as the Marsh farm.



This was a sort of Ellis Island where the captives awaited their acceptance into the new nation. Its location would put it about three miles South of Gannagaro, the capital. As Parker points out, this Seneca-ization kept them numerically powerful, making up their military losses.

Next on the Seneca death list came the Erie, population about 14,000. The Seneca had thought hopefully of peace

with them, and several Erie ambassadors were taken into the village to discuss matters. Their hopes were aborted when one of the Erie unwisely chose to kill a Seneca warrior right in his own village.

So, as the saying goes, "the fight was on." But no serious steps were taken by the Seneca until later when the Erie burned to death one of their beloved chiefs. What followed must have been an unforgettable sight.

One thousand eight hundred Iroquois set out across Lake Ontario in canoes to avenge him. When they reached shore, they went into action with the systematic thoroughness that struck fear into anyone who counted them enemies. The Senecas wiped out the Erie settlements and so frightened the inhabitants that some went as far from their native homeland as to seek sanctuary with the Cherokee.

Next on the list was the Andaste, a nation whose reputation had scared off lesser enemies and whose capital was on the Susquehanna. This war lasted ten years and ended with a Seneca victory. This all took place, Parker says, between 1630 and 1675. Eventually the Seneca tribe was made up of some 11 refugee nations besides their own people -- due to their practical "Seneca-ization" methods.

These adopted enemies, once they were found faithful, were given the same rights and affection as their brother Seneca. It's believed by many historians that if the Seneca had been permitted peace by other tribes they would have accepted it gladly.

Humor, Purpose

The Seneca were known to have a good sense of humor. The stoic expressions they presented to the white man were "company manners," according to Parker. They listed lacrosse as one of their sports, had good and evil strongly identified as celestial beings, and their ideals were youthful in their loftiness.

But they had determined, as white men had before and after them, that peace could only come with the defeat of their enemies. So in 1680 they set out again.

This time it was the Illinois they routed, chasing them down the Illinois River until they were satisfied they were satisfactorily beaten.

In every case, it was clearly not the Seneca's intention to wage one of those "first them and then us" battles that had typified previous Indian wars and decided nothing. These were wars to end all wars -- with their enemy so thoroughly beaten as to cease being a potential threat. And in every case, the Seneca were successful.

It's not surprising that when the French decided to move against the Seneca through the Marquis de Denonville and his troops in 1687 they didn't think of it as an unimportant skirmish.

They didn't recognize their enemy for what he was, but they had learned something of his potential. The Marquis started out with 1,600 Continentals, supplemented it with



nearly a thousand Indians who had good reason to fight the Seneca, then added nearly 500 other Canadian forces.

Their march through the Bushnell's Basin and Victor area is a story in itself.

The Seneca fled before the overwhelming forces, but not before giving a good account of themselves in a ravine off what is now Route 96 between Bushnell's Basin and Victor, and not before burning their famed Gannagaro to the ground. (Some accounts say that it was Denonville's men who burned the capital.)

The Seneca fled, but not without purpose. They were off across the wide terrain in quest of help from their brother Iroquois. They got it, but too late. The French had left before they could strike back.

As consequence, all the Marquis had to contend with was the Seneca's crops. These he proceeded to destroy, figuring that when the Indians returned they'd die of starvation. The frustrated Indians in Denonville's forces, who had come to kill Seneca, dubbed him "Corn Cutter" as a result of this action, and the French lost face to a damaging degree.

Moreover, when the Seneca returned, instead of obligingly starving, they were only further incensed at the wantonness of the destruction. Tactics like these were beneath the Indian, who fought battles and left men's crops alone.

Parker described the Seneca as angry bees whose nest has been attacked. The French invasion, he said, "lighted a conflagration that could not be extinguished."

They recouped as best they could and then made a move which was one of the most significant in American colonial history. They turned to the English for support against the French and got it.

Two things had thus happened that resulted in the English Americans gaining control of the new land. First, they had the powerful and French-hating Iroquois League as their allies.

Second, and more round-about in its significance, was the fact that without Indian resistance the pattern of white settlement would have been very different.

This, Parker and other historians point out, would have resulted in a Dutch settlement here, a French settlement there, a Swedish settlement someplace else. As it worked out, by the time the settlers were able to plant their flag and say we're here to stay, they were ready to become a unified group of men under one flag. And thanks to their allies, the Seneca, it was the English-speaking people who finally planted it.

In the case of the Indian himself, it's impossible to say what strides the Iroquois League might have made had its existence not been altered by the white man. Every race has to begin somewhere, and the League was the American Indian's beginning.

Only One Headstone

The only monument at Gannagaro was put up by a priest from Canandaigua in tribute to the Jesuits.

On occasion, Jesuits from other parts of the country visit this region. Some, like Father Jean LeClerc of the College of Jesuits in Quebec, come from countries other than the United States.

This is more than a general interest in history. It's an almost proprietary interest in an area where, over 300 years ago, the Jesuits lived with physical hardship as the least of their problems and with a courage that, had it not been based on Faith, would have been foolhardy.

The following excerpts are from a moving letter written in 1656 by the Rev. Francois LeMercier to the head of his Order. It's from a translation of "The Jesuit Relations."

" embarking on the most dangerous and likewise the most glorious enterprise that can be undertaken in this country . . . we go to establish ourselves among the Iroquois

... We see that ever since that first havoc (he's referring to the Iroquois war on the Huron) they have always pushed on their conquests, and have made themselves so redoubtable in the country that everything gives way before their arms. ... Notwithstanding ... we consider ourselves so convinced of the will of God -- who, of old, turned his greatest persecutors into his most illustrious Apostles ... that we have no doubt that, at the present time, he opens the door to his Preachers, that they may go and plant the faith in the very heart of his enemies, triumph over their barbarity, change these Wolves and Tigers into Lambs, and bring them into the fold of Jesus Christ."

Verification that the Jesuits met their enormously brave challenge shows up whenever artifacts are found at Boughton Hill, or Gannagaro as it was known when it was the Seneca Capital.

Numerous Jesuit rings have turned up and black glass buttons, known as "Cassock" or "Jesuit buttons." Robert Graham, Victor, has a number of these latter in his collection. Sheldon Fisher, Fishers, has several of the Jesuit rings. A wooden crucifix with brass figure was buried with two adolescents whose remains were found there. Someone else discovered a delicate little bell that might have been used during Mass.

But some of the Jesuits paid dearly. Accounts of the torture and death of these men are in the "Jesuit Relations" and other historical documents.

It was not just wanton behavior on the part of the Iroquois or, in this region, the Seneca. For them this was part and parcel of warfare and the testing of the enemy. And to them the Jesuit was an enemy.

First, they were French and the Iroquois had nothing but nightmare recollections of their dealings with the French. Second, the Jesuits were friends of their other archenemy, the Huron (the Jesuits had made great strides introducing Christianity to the Huron when the Iroquois descended to almost literally wipe out the tribe). In neither of these instances could the Seneca yet see that the role of the Jesuit superseded his nationality and put him above the possibility of treachery or warfare.



'Foxes And Lions'

Thirdly, the historians say the very nature of the Seneca, or any of the Iroquois tribes, was against having a totally new concept presented by a white-skinned stranger.

These were no basket-weaving, malleable natives, but the strong-willed, hard-hitting Keepers of the Western Door of the Long House of the Iroquois. They had only just begun to embark on their own new concept of a united strength designed to eventually bring peace. They were the warriors who, with the other four tribes, had set out to remove every enemy.

As Father Jerome Lalemant wrote in the "Relations": "They come like foxes through the wood. They attack like lions. They take flight like birds, disappearing before they have really appeared."

Knowing this, the Jesuits still came. What they saw was, in part anyway, suffering. What they finally "conquered" was done in the only way possible, by earning the Iroquois' respect.

And this they did through bravery and integrity. For example, when the French Marquis de Denonville was advancing to put an end to Gannagaro and, he hoped, the Seneca, there was a Jesuit priest living with the Onondaga League brothers to the Seneca.

He, being a Frenchman, realized his position and how it must look to the Onondaga, who would assume that he knew of this enemy attack and had kept it from them. He hadn't. But he didn't expect the Onondaga to take his word for it. And knowing their exacting judgment on duplicity, he expected death.

Instead, one of the chiefs told him: "We know you too well to believe you meant to betray us." He was escorted safely out of the danger area.

This was recognition of integrity from a people who, despite their seeming codeless behavior in the treatment of the enemy, valued honor every bit as much as they did bravery.

All during those years (1611-1768) of working with the Indian people the Jesuits kept records and wrote long and comprehensive letters to their superiors. As a result, without actually setting out to do so, they kept a diary of the nation's early days. These papers were first recognized as valuable in Paris in the late 17th century when material dating between the years 1632 and 1673 was published by Sebastian Cramoisy.



But the "Jesuit Relations," as they were to be called, dropped out of general knowledge. No more was heard of them until 1856, when the Canadian government recognized their worth. They were brought to light again and later revised (in 1867) by Francis Parkman and called "The Jesuits in North America."

In 1894, the Burrows Bros. Co. of Cleveland, Ohio,

republished the early Quebec edition with an English translation. As this material came to light in the hands of publishers, the latter received additional data--letters, maps, etc.--that might be pertinent. All of this was published under one heading, but only to the tune of 750 sets. So they were and are still a rare item. However, there are books (there's one at the Rochester Public Library) which contain translated excerpts from the "Relations."

They make stirring reading for anyone, let alone for those living in the area where those courageous men lived and, too often, died.

French Write 'Finis'

The French all-out attempts to put an end to the Seneca had their high points in this immediate area and culminated in the Gannagaro campaign.

It had the blessing of the King of France, was under the command of the fanatic Marquis de Denonville, and took place in 1687.

The plan was simple. Denonville was to march into the Seneca's very front yard, so to speak, with overwhelming forces (almost 3,000 men) and wipe them out. Like most endeavors it was different in the carrying out than it appeared on paper.

The route of Denonville's army is of particular interest to this region. It started at the mouth of Irondequoit Bay and was to bring them to Marsh Rd. and then Bushnell's Basin. From what historians have pieced together through relics of the march and written data and maps, the attack and march that preceded it went as follows:

The first bad moment for the French came when they had to cross Irondequoit Creek at what is today the Pittsford-Victor Rd., between Pittsford and Bushnell's Basin. They had it on their agenda as a logical spot for the Seneca

attack, when they had the enemy out in the open. Nothing happened, which may have come as a relief, or possibly made them even more jumpy. They had been prepared for an attack, now they were wondering why the Seneca were holding off.

They progressed down what is now Route 96 between Bushnell's Basin and Victor, with the Seneca capital of Gannagaro as the main target.

Robert Graham, in his book "Ashes to the Wind," describes what the feelings of the Continental troops must have been in this new land as they awaited an attack at every bend.

They weren't used to forest fighting, and forest is what this land was then. They knew the Seneca as ruthless forest fighters--as much at home in the woods as wild animals, as silent as deer when they wished to remain hidden, and as unerring as panthers when the time came for attack.

He writes: "One can almost feel the sting from the driving rain squalls that so often impeded their advance; . . . one can almost feel the torrid heat of the Seneca jungle as the soldiers wearily march inland from the Irondequoit . . . one can almost hear the terrifying war cries of the Seneca, and feel the bite of their deadly tomahawks; . . . one almost feels within his heart the fear that shook each individual as he roamed the Seneca country, knowing that every bend in the trail could be another ambush."

This gives an idea of the reputation of the Seneca. The French troops vastly outnumbered the enemy and were better armed. But they knew they were taking on a worthy opponent and they must have been taut with suspense as they got closer and closer to the capital.

There have been several opinions about the exact spot where the Seneca finally struck. According to archaeologist and historian Sheldon Fisher, Fishers, it was in a spot where the ravine was about one-eighth of a mile long. He believes the Seneca attacked from both sides of the ravine.

Fisher spots the bivouac area as south of what is now the Willowbrook Trailer Park, where over 100 camp fire sites have been uncovered.

Graham describes the ambush from the Seneca standpoint ". . . the Seneca quickly decided that the best

place for the ambush would be where the trail dropped from the highlands into the valley forming a rather steep, treacherous defile . . . though the selected place of ambush (about a mile west of Victor) was closer to the village (Gannagaro) than the Seneca would have liked, they still had confidence that they would turn back the enemy, despite the latter's numbers.

"In the ravine, the Seneca place five hundred of their number, with the remaining three hundred situated on the opposite side of the trail, across from the ravine."

The tactics were worthy of a skilled officer. They figured that when the French were descending the slope, the three hundred would fire on them, thus luring the remainder to hasten to their rescue -- and a trap, for the other 500 Seneca (it's known the Seneca had only 800 men to Denonville's almost 3,000) would enter the fray from behind and cut them off. They believed that by holing them up with their backs to the hill they stood a chance of putting an end to them.

Indian Ambush

Actually their plan went like clockwork -- and their attack was, as one historian put it, "as though hell had opened and all the demons had been let loose."

But there was one hitch.

The Seneca hadn't known that some of the French forces were far enough behind to have missed the first response to their comrades' plight. So they hadn't been caught in the Seneca trap. And just when the Indians seemed to have the situation well in hand, reinforcements appeared, and the tide of battle turned, with the Seneca finally retreating. Nonetheless, historians are still marveling over their ability against such great odds.

The Seneca, the history books say, then fled, leaving behind them the charred ruins of their illustrious village. It's true they fled, having gotten a full view of the enemy's

numbers. They fled to get additional support from their brothers in the Iroquois League. And they had every intention of coming back.



After having gotten the better of their Indian foes in the ravine foray, Denonville's troops met no more opposition. Still shaky from the savage attack, they expected another encounter at every turn, but reached Gannagaro unchallenged. This was another surprise. The village had been fired by the Seneca and was only a smoldering ruin.



It was at this stage that Denonville chose to destroy all of the Seneca corn crops. In so doing he made every member of the Iroquois League an everlasting enemy. The Iroquois believed that crops were sacred to the Great Spirit. To them this destruction was the most wanton act Denonville could have performed. His purpose was to insure their starvation should they return. But all he accomplished was to earn for the French the hatred of the strongest Indian power in the New World.

It was this historic blunder that caused the Iroquois to turn to the English as allies and by so doing to insure them supremacy of the New World.

No matter what approach historians take to the white man's predecessors on the North American Continent, if they discuss the Iroquois, they eventually get to the Seneca and then to their ill-fated capital, Gannagaro. So well known was this village that its name was familiar even in Europe.

The Jesuit Story

300 years ago, a white man came to Gannagaro, now Boughton Hill, during a serious epidemic among the Seneca Indians. He stayed to build a mission called St. James.

His name was Father Julian Garnier and he was a Jesuit and a Frenchman.

Through the unbelievable twistings of fate, the descendants of the Senecas whose souls he fought to save are today fighting to save the land he chose for a mission.

This was long before the Iroquois led the early white colonists through the basic steps of what was to become the Constitution of the United States, or signified, in any lasting fashion, that they were a people apart.

But even as the villains, their dignity and intelligence are noted.

And so, in these unparalleled records of the New World,

come accounts of places which take on drama and importance by their inclusion in the records.

In many instances, the Seneca Indians are referred to in "The Jesuit Relations" as the Sonnontouan. In the Huron language Sonnontouan meant "the great hill people."

They might have been the folks who lived on the hill, but they were also the bane of the Jesuits' lives. In these early reports you have to look hard to find liking or respect, but it's there . . . "and three of their captains thanked me publicly in speeches that one would not believe could emanate from the intellect of those whom we call savages" (Fr. Simon LeMoyne, 1655).

Great Beauty

Earlier, a 1643 letter shows the Iroquois strategy that helped wipe out all their enemies . . . "this present year they have changed their plan, and have separated themselves into small bands of 20, 30, 50 or 100 at the most, along all the passages and places of the river and when one band goes away, another replaces it . . . to occupy the whole great river and to lay ambushes along it everywhere; from these they issue unexpectedly and fall indifferently upon the Montagnais, Algonquins, Huron and French."

Another letter (1671): "They have their government like all the rest of the people of the earth . . . there would be nothing more beautiful than this world, if the gospel were observed in it."

(1671, speaking of Christian zeal among some of the converts) . . . "it purges our little flock from all the brutalities which our Iroquois had (practiced) among the 16 nations whom they destroyed by their valor and adroitness."

But it was a long time before the French Jesuits found it anything less than suicide to venture so far into the Iroquois Longhouse as to confront the Seneca in their villages. Fr. Paul LeJeune wrote in the 1630's; "The deputies of the whole county have gone to Sonnontouan to confirm

this peace. They wanted me to go to this Sonnontouan but I did not judge it wise to go yet . . ." Sonnontouan was another name for the second largest of the Seneca towns, known better as Totiakton. It was where the town of Mendon is on the northeast bend of Honeoye Creek.

Fr. Chaumonot (1656) is the first white man recorded to have visited these Seneca villages, but because of the constant warfare waged between the Iroquois and their enemies, he realized that to try for a permanent mission at this stage was foolish.

All told, the Senecas had several good-sized villages in this region: Gannagaro, the capital; Totiakton, second in size; and Gannogarae, about four miles southeast of Avon Springs at the "source of the little Conesus Creek."

Historian O.H. Marshall tells of one account of Champlain, when he was said to have "laid siege to a Seneca Village, then situated on the west side of Canandaigua Lake." But other historians, he said, claim Champlain came no further west than Onondaga Lake, at present day, Syracuse.

Fr. Garnier was not the first priest to enter the domain of the haughty Seneca, although he's mentioned in more historical accounts than his predecessor, Fr. Fremin, who started the mission of St. Michael at Gannogarae a bit earlier.

How these two men, in the year 1668, entered these once-feared villages unchallenged, and how they stayed to walk paths where area children today ride school buses is enthralling.

The Indomitable One

Knowing this climate, visualizing what it must have been like to live through fifteen Winters on the high and windy site at Boughton Hill, Victor, it seems incredible that Father Julian Garnier could have kept alive, unconditioned as he was to the hardy living of only a Seneca campfire between him and the stinging cold.

But he did stick it out from 1668 until 1683. Other Jesuits came and went, Father Fremin, Father Rafaix, Father Pierron. All came to this area and left valuable work behind. But each stayed only a portion of the time Father Garnier put in.

Others spoke of this region in their letters incorporated in the famed "Jesuit Relations" as a kind of last ditch. It was the farthest outpost among the feared Iroquois; the land of the Seneca with a reputation as the quickest in temper.

But somewhere in each report was the astonished notation that Father Garnier was still baptizing the seemingly untamable "Sonnontouan" despite wars, suspicion, and superstition.



Father Garnier wrote some letters back to his superior himself. But they concentrated on the good things and it took other missionary letters to describe what some of these Winters in Upstate New York must have been like then.

The Seneca had their longhouses to protect them against the full blast of the storms, and their fires for heat. But that was it.

One missionary tells of how everyone huddled inside with the fires going and how the smoke became so thick in the longhouses that their eyes stung unbearably and they'd either lie close to the floor for relief or even go outside for as long as they could stand it to ease their eyes. He tells of how the missionaries used to write letters back to their superiors in Canada or France under these conditions, blinking through the haze of smoke and trying to see by the fire light.

Other things overshadowed this but even in these plights the dedicated French Jesuit, who came to know this area so well, remained and succeeded.

The following is an excerpt from a letter written in 1681: "It's related that a Seneca chief is killed by the

Illinois and that the Iroquois intend to revenge his death . . . also it's rumored that the English are inciting the Iroquois against the French . . . a sudden expedition against the Seneca is proposed." Things became more critical as time went on, and yet in 1683 a missionary wrote back to his superiors the astonishing news that within the very eye of the storm "The superior of the mission wrote me sometime ago that hardly anyone died at Sonnontouan (Seneca country) where Father Julian Garnier is, without previously receiving baptism."

How this Jesuit came to be sent here in the first place is a dramatic story in itself.

The Jesuits had been laboring in behalf of Christianity in North America for almost 60 years before the proud Iroquois confederacy decided the time for their conversion was at hand.

The reason that prompted them to change their minds about the once-hated "black robes" was typical in that it combined strategic thinking with proud assumption. But the Jesuit fathers, besides wanting to save souls, had already begun to see this confederacy as a cut above others in intelligence, and to value them as a frightening, seemingly unattainable prize. So they risked sending Fathers Garnier and Fremin to a God-forsaken spot deep in Seneca country called Gannagaro (Boughton Hill, Victor) and still another Seneca village three miles Southeast of Victor called Gannogarae in 1668. Even earlier, Father LeMoyne had journeyed to a place south of Manlius that became the first Onondaga mission.

Historians were astonished by the Iroquois' audacity. They had destroyed the Montagnais people between Quebec and the Saguenay, the Algonquin, the Hurons, the Neutrals and other nations, wiping out the Jesuit missions wherever they occurred within these settlements and, in nearly every instance, treated the missionaries as the enemy.

Then, writes R. G. Thwaites, "The politic Iroquois, attacked on either side by the Erie and the Susquehannas, and fearing that while thus engaged their Northern victims might revive for combined vengeance, sent overtures of

peace to Quebec and cordially invited to their cantonments the once detested black gowns." (Actually it wasn't all that politic. Historians learned years later that the Iroquois in a longterm effort toward peace had decided that they had to wipe out all their squabbling enemies to attain it. They were in the process of doing this when the missionaries came and settled among their enemies.)

O. H. Marshall brought it even closer to home for this area when he wrote "... the Seneca, the most populous and warlike of the confederacy, desirous in sharing in the same religious advantages, sent a deputation of their most influential chiefs to Montreal in November, 1668, asking the Jesuits to send missionaries."

Father Simon LeMoyne was the one to make what must have been a frightening first step into Iroquois country when he followed that now historic route down the St. Lawrence. He wrote in the "Jesuit Relations" "... we saw nothing but islands ... then the mouth of a great lake called Ontario, we call it the Lake of the Iroquois ... we had four leagues to cover before arriving at the Chief Village, Onnontagua," (just southeast of what is now Manlius; the closest good-sized neighboring city being Syracuse).

What happened to LeMoyne, his reception and his reactions, were unnervingly important because everyone was hopeful but wary. Father LeMoyne's quotations from the Iroquois told so much about this feisty, strangely ambitious nation that had been looking for answers in all the wrong places and for peace with all the finesse of an army tank.

The following quote is from Father LeMoyne's letter of that year when he shows how intelligently and thoughtfully they made their request: "... we conjure you to choose a site that will be advantageous to you on the shores of our great lake (Ontario) in order to build thereon a proper settlement. Place yourself in the heart of the country where you are to receive our hearts. Show us paternal care and we will render you filial obedience."

It was Father Fremin who first answered the Seneca's call. He came to this immediate area to find the Indians rapidly dying from a plague he didn't recognize. It's very

possible that his appearance at this time and his gentle compassion with the sick were responsible for his ready acceptance. The same went for Father Garnier who followed fast on Father Fremin's heels. Though the plague was then about over, he would have been accepted as brother to a man who had done all in his power for a stricken people--and probably more important to the proud Seneca, who had made no attempt to avoid contagion. It's entirely possible the Seneca, who had no close contact with the white man, had him pictured as a fussy, easily put-off person.

In a letter to his superior in 1669, Father Fremin wrote about the past year's events. His letter, translated from the French, should be exciting to people in this area because he's talking about places they know well. The following are excerpts:

"Our Iroquois mission made during the past year very considerable progress. We began the preaching of the Gospel there at Sonnontouan (Seneca County) where there are more people than in the four other Iroquois nations.

"When I arrived here . . . I was very well received. . . a kind of contagion . . . ravaged the whole country to such an extent that my entire occupation was to visit the cabins constantly . . . I baptized more than six-score persons, nearly all adults, of whom more than ninety died. . . Obligated me . . . to beg Father Garnier, who was at Onnontagua to come and help me. . .

"Having no further occupation with the sick, we began to proclaim the Gospel . . . Father Garnier took charge of the village named Gandachiragou (he means Gannagaro which is now Boughton Hill). There in a short time he built a Chapel which is very convenient and to which people come from all directions for instructions. (Among the artifacts found at Boughton Hill are a crucifix and a bell such as might have been used in the celebration of Mass.)

"As for me, on 27 September, 1669, I entered the village named Gandougarar (or Gannagarae, about three miles south of Gannagaro, near East Bloomfield at a place fairly recently known as the Marsh farm) where I was received with all the marks of public joy."

La Salle Enters

Robert Cavalier de La Salle, one of France's best known explorers, landed in Irondequoit Bay in August, 1669.

He was looking for an Indian Guide and it was well known that the Seneca listed among their captives about every tribe familiar to the white man.

Robert J. Graham, a Victor resident, says in his book "Ashes to the Wind," "the identification of the exact site of



the Seneca village La Salle visited has led to one of the most active and interesting controversies concerning the documentation of Seneca sites during recent years. Certain authorities have been most vehement in placing this event at the Seneca village of Totiakton, opposite Rochester Junction station. Others maintain that the site was at Boughton Hill, Victor."

Graham did a study of all available data (the journal and map made by Father Brehant de Galinee who accompanied LaSalle was the most valuable reference) and sees Boughton Hill or Gannagaro as it was known when it was the Seneca capital, as the most likely spot.

He admits, as do all historians, that this can never really be proven. Nowhere was a name ever given. His reasons for siding with Gannagaro begin with the fact that it was by far the best known abroad. Putting himself in LaSalle's shoes, so to speak, it seemed the "most logical choice."

Also, Graham tells that Father Galinee's journal includes the remark, "in sight of the great village." He calls attention to the fact that the word "the" rather than "a" could only mean Gannagaro which was indisputably THE village so far as the Indians in this part of the country were concerned.

Another strong point he sees in favor of Gannagaro is the fact that Father Galinee, while being pretty graphic about other terrain, fails to mention a stream in connection with the village. Totiakton, the other Rochester site, was "in the great bend of Honeoye Creek" and Graham doesn't see how it could remain unmentioned if that were the spot they journeyed to.

There are other geographic points involved. Those who favor the Totiakton site call attention to the priest's reference to it being on a small hill. Since, by our standards, Boughton Hill is no small hill, they feel this rules it out. However, Graham points out that in this same journal Father Galinee calls Irondequoit Bay a "small stream." He must have, the author feels, been accustomed to large-scale terrain that made geographic features here seem small to

him, while not necessarily small to us.

And so it goes.

If Father Galinee had had an inkling that the young man he accompanied would someday be more famous than the French king, he would probably have been more specific in his chronicles, for the benefit of future generations.

But at this particular time, La Salle was just starting out on his explorations; to all intents, just another young man hoping to claim new horizons for France and in the process gain some personal fame and wealth. Actually Father Galinee probably never lived to see LaSalle for what he really was. Only the men who traveled with him recognized him as a breed apart. Most them feared or hated him for the driving force that carried him (and his grumbling exploration parties) through waist-deep swamps, enemy Indian territory, and near-starvation. He spent money rather than gained it, made dangerous enemies, and was finally shot by one of his own men.

He did have one personal gain. He realized a dream he'd had since he was 12 years old -- he had ventured through the wilderness that was America and found her mighty rivers.

In Ronald Syme's "La Salle of the Mississippi," he tells some of the gruelling moments that distinguished Robert de La Salle as a totally fearless man. During a terrible storm when their vessel, "The Griffin," was on the verge of destruction, "La Salle stayed on deck. Clinging to one of the masts, he did his best to encourage the frightened pilot."

Another time, from a journal, "There were so many brambles and thorns that after a couple of days our clothing was very badly ripped. Our faces were so smeared with blood that we could scarcely recognize one another." But neither hardships nor Indian attacks turned him back.

One thing that La Salle did have working for him was his understanding of the Indians. He didn't go blundering along, inflaming them by ignoring their beliefs and customs as did some of the explorers.

Syme's book tells of how La Salle entered an empty Indian village when his men were hungry. "They'll be back here in the Spring," he is reputed to have told his men, "I expect they've left their grain pits full of corn, however,

so we'll take a little of it. It will probably anger them, for these caches are almost sacred, but we may meet the tribe lower down the river. If so we will tell them what we've done, and give them some presents in exchange."

They did meet the tribe and the latter was impressed with his understanding and fairness.

La Salle wasn't present when the Iroquois (cited by the author as the most deadly warriors in North America) made their historic attack on the Illinois. But his trusted friend and lieutenant was. His name was Tonty, and he so impressed the Iroquois that one of their chiefs called to him "Go away Frenchman. You are brave, and we admire your courage. But now we will follow the Illinois down the river and destroy them as we have destroyed the town." Tonty outlived La Salle and was probably one of the few men who respected his dauntless spirit rather than feared it.

But however men took him, it's obvious from history books that a lesser man wouldn't have endured. He earned the reputation for being a "cold, fearless leader, always ready to risk his life." As a consequence, no American history book is complete without mention of him. And even today, it's cause for distinction to know that he walked throughout this region in quest of a guide for the adventures that were to make him famous.

Hiawatha Is Ours

Hiawatha is ours.

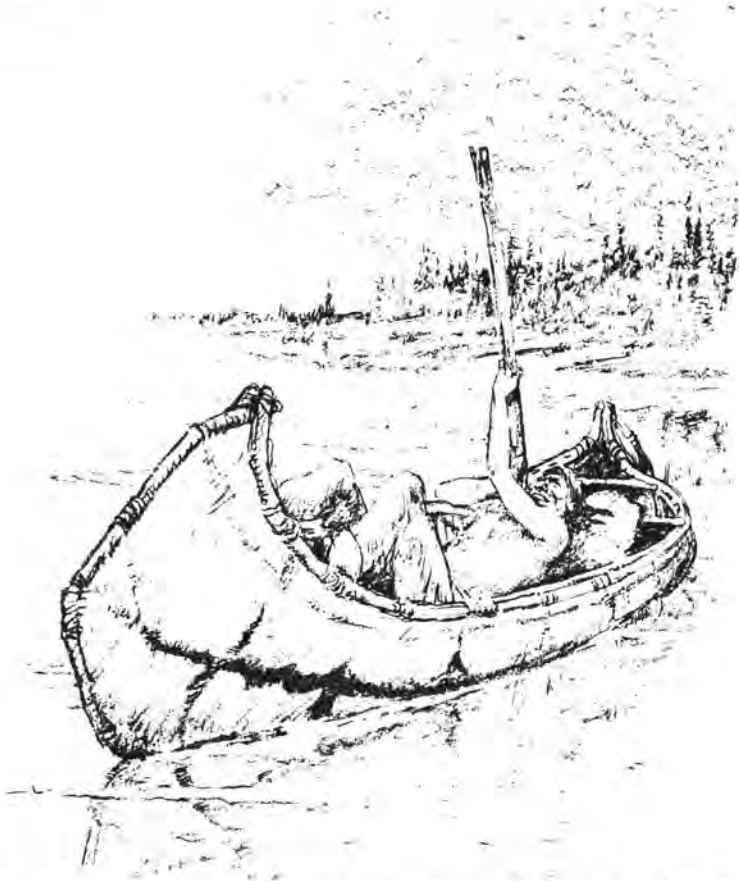
... The exquisite "Song" of a godlike being in a land far from here, created from hazy fallacies given to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow . . . the historians' search for the living Hiawatha in the tales and legends told from the fifteenth and sixteenth century. . . the man himself, a crusader who crossed and recrossed the routes we take to sell the American Indian on a League of Nations -- all of these are rightfully ours.

Because it happened here.

Through Perinton, Henrietta, Pittsford, Penfield, Fishers, Victor, wherever the Seneca lived, the real

Hiawatha carried his message until he and Deganawidah, the great Mohawk Chief, convinced the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca of the need for an Iroquois confederacy.

To people with no stake in it, myth or man, it wouldn't matter.



But, as one author and historian said, to those who cherish their history, "It is as if Europeans of some fictional age were to have placed before them an epic narrative of French heroisms and adventure in which Prince Bismarck would appear as the chief and central Gallic figure in the glory and triumph of France.

"The error . . . would be as the Germans say 'colossal.'"

But the error by Longfellow endured to make the word "Hiawatha" as common as a child's school desk.

And the historians have done their work. Most people now know about the adopted Mohawk.

"In verse, myth and actual fact Hiawatha was a giant in the field of socio-political unity," according to C. Fayne Porter.

But what people in the Genesee Valley region want to hear is that the man came to these parts and spent some time; that he searched out the Seneca who abounded in the immediate area and who later built their historic capital, Gannagaro, at Boughton Hill, Victor.

According to J. Sheldon Fisher of Valentown, Fishers, an historian and president of Gannagaro, Assoc., it's not a question of having to read between the lines of confusing stories.

We know that Hiawatha would have had to concentrate much of his time here, probably sleeping wherever the earth offered a couch, or until the Seneca accepted him and his fantastic ideal as a real possibility to end war.

Since we know the Seneca finally made their large capital seven miles from Pittsford, it stands to reason that the whole area had been his stamping grounds for some time.

The importance of what Hiawatha and Deganawidah set in motion with their League of Nations is dramatically captured in Wallace's "The White Roots of Peace."

The Indians, he clarifies, think of Deganawidah as the mind from which the idea of the League sprang, and Hiawatha as the one who finally made it happen.

Wallace set out on a single page: 1945, San Francisco, and the beginning of a preamble to the constitution of the United Nations:

"We the people of the United States, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

And beneath it under the dateline (circa) 1450:

Onondaga; "I am Deganawidah and with the Five Nations confederate lords I plant the Tree of the Great Peace . . ."

And at the end of his book, Wallace has a page which reads: "1450, Onondaga: Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace . . ." and under it the end of the preamble of the United Nations, dateline 1945.

What intrigued the historians who learned of the two League founders was that "it leaped almost full-fledged from the mind of a man born into the cruelty and savagery of a Stone Age culture which set the highest value on 'destroy thy neighbor.' This man, long legendary among his own people, has since become legendary in the English-speaking culture through an unfortunate blunder and in an entirely different sense" (Longfellow's poem).

But, as author William Beauchamps pointed out, Longfellow did the illustrious Iroquois a great service.

"His own fame insured the resultant fame of Hiawatha, gave the world itself some idea of frequent scenes in our forest life."

He, also, Beauchamps pointed out, presented through his hero the idea of a thoroughly unselfish man.

"How he prayed and how he fasted,
How he lived and toiled and suffered,
That the tribes of men might prosper,
That he might advance his people."

This was the mettle of Longfellow's Hiawatha and could have described the flesh and blood Hiawatha.

Another historian remarked that although the Five Nations of the League for peace revered Deganawidah, they never gave him the same affectionate reverence which "always clung to the name of Hiawatha." It was also noted that Hiawatha heads a long line of successors.

In 1897 a published list of Canadian chiefs showed David Thomas as his successor.

The various spellings of both proper names and tribal names through the years have confused historians, but there's usually enough similarity to recognize who or what tribe is under discussion.

It's not so much that residents of this area don't understand the facts of Hiawatha and, ultimately, the League of Nations having so much effect on their destinies. It's that they have to stop and think that men they were taught to think of as uncouth savages, had the intellect, sensitivity, and love of nature that would have started them on the way to their own renaissance, if we hadn't stepped in to literally drive them to the wall in their own land.

A book called "Orite of Adequentaga" is the journal of a white man in the 1600's who traveled with a Mohawk called Orite.

Some of the quotes show how far-reaching were the Iroquois League's principles of right and wrong.

The Peace Queen

When 300 years have passed, stories get confused, legends are added onto or changed, pride encroaches on truth. American history is riddled with inaccuracies, but they're based on a core of truth strong enough to hold up under the embellishments.

The same is true of the American Indians' famous League of the Iroquois.

The descendants of its nations are concerned today over the burial site of their Peace Queen, a figure who might have given Wadsworth even more material to work with than her colleague Hiawatha.

She is buried at Boughton Hill, Victor, in the area being purchased by the State Parks Department for preservation as a national park. And until the land is all safely under the wing of a state grant, the Iroquois descendants won't breathe freely.

Nor will they disclose even the approximate location of her grave for fear of vandalism or excavation.



Her name was Jikonsaseh, and she's known by several titles. The Mother of the Nations is one; the Peace Queen is another.

She earned the latter in the 1600's by traveling all over what is now New York State in an effort to get the Indian nations to band together in peace. Many wouldn't join, but those who did were the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, the Seneca, and later the Tuscarora. (It's not widely known, but according to an area historian the Rice Lake Indians made up a seventh and later split away.)

Very little is known about her, except with the Indian nations themselves, but she and Daganoweda, the famous Sachem and founder of the Iroquois confederacy, and his spokesman Hayewentha (Hiawatha) were the trio behind the historic League of Iroquois.

Her title, Mother of Nations, was a traditional one and in the 1650's when she was brought to Ganarqua (Mud Creek in East Bloomfield) the Seneca became guardians of her descendants. They were revered as descendants of the "first woman born on earth."

It is known that Ely S. Parker, a brilliant young Seneca Indian who settled in Monroe County in the 1800's, was responsible for a great deal of what is now known about the Iroquois nations. But he was lost to this region because few here called upon him as a young lawyer and he moved away, later becoming a brigadier-general under Ulysses S. Grant.

It was Parker who wrote up the terms of Lee's surrender and who, possibly with the perception of Indian background, realized what was most upsetting to the Southern army. He went to Grant and suggested the surrender terms include the stipulation that the Southern men could keep their horses and take them home to work

their farms. This inclusion and its warm reception is one of the most touching stories to come out of that troubled time.

This man was a direct descendant of Jikonsaseh.

A generation after this happened the director of the Rochester Museum, who had been searching for artifacts in the Mud Creek region, turned his site over to a banker at what turned out to be a very crucial time. A grave was uncovered containing a carpet covered with fresh water pearls, and with the bones was a ceremonial pipe also encrusted with pearls. The findings were shown to Dr. Arthur C. Parker, a historian and nephew of Ely Parker. He is reputed to have said, "Why, that's my great-great-grandmother." The artifacts were turned down by the museum and consequently went to the Buffalo Museum.

The pearls denoted royalty to Indians. They had come across a female descendant of Jikonsaseh, who would have been revered as each successive female of the line was revered. (The pearls had lost their value and were flaking.)

It was thought at the time that she was Jikonsaseh herself, but her grave, the Iroquois say, has never been disturbed and each year "when the grass begins to sprout" Indians from other parts of the country unobtrusively make a pilgrimage to the site.

The last of the female line was General Parker's sister, Miss Caroline G. Parker, who married a Tuscarora named John Mountpleasant and was, during her life, referred to as the "Queen of the Seneca."

The Seneca were so honored at having the Mother of Nations buried on their capital site (Gannagaro, now Boughton Hill) that during the 1600's they made clay pipes with the bowls fashioned after her likeness. Archaeologists have turned up a good many of them and now recognize them for what they are.

Jikonsaseh's fame as a member of the trio that triggered the league of the Iroquois, coupled with the reverence accorded her as the Iroquois' symbolic Mother of Nations, explains the attitude taken by Iroquois descendants toward any unauthorized treatment of the land where she's buried. It's another reason for their long-time attempts to have all of the Gannagaro site preserved for future generations.



Forgotten Heroes

"Monsieur de Callieres marched past, and fought a desperate battle near your home."

Tell this to the average area school boy and you probably won't shake him out of his sneakers.

The same goes for names like Baron deLahonton, Daniel Duluth, Henri Tonty, and Francois d'Orvilliers.

Each of these men shot like comets to fame in the 17th Century--and for reasons that live on in the 20th Century.

But either because fate, or the patron of public relations wasn't on their side, their importance is known to a very few.

(For openers, it was Daniel Duluth for whom Duluth, Minn. was named.)

They marched from Irondequoit Bay ... to Landing Rd ... Allen's Creek ... East Ave. ... Pittsford ... Bushnell's Basin, and finally to Victor.

According to a well-known historian and author, the Rev. Robert F. McNamara of St. Bernard's Seminary, "The most impressive array of military leaders ever assembled for a single battle," marched in 1687 with the French Marquis de Denonville against the Seneca Indian capital of Gannagaro, now Boughton Hill, Victor.

The Baron deLahonton was the most noteworthy. He wrote a book, a dialogue between himself and an Indian called "The Rat." This treatise, according to the late George B. Selden of Perinton, was the pioneer literary work for the school of thought which triggered the French Revolution.

Fighting beside him was Louis Hector de Callieres. He was commander-in-chief of the army that set out to wipe out the Seneca capital. Letters dating back to the 17th Century state that he "distinguished himself" in that campaign. He

was the first Canadian officer awarded the Cross of St. Louis.

He also was governor of Canada in 1699, replacing Frontenac. Frontenac's fame lived on through resorts and hotels named after him. . . and what historians must call pure luck. Frontenac had none of the military and political know-how of Callieres, who was even credited with negotiating a peace with the Indians in 1701.

These two men, Lahonton and Callieres, were only nervous young officers in 1687. Callieres had led his men unwittingly into a cleverly-laid trap set by the Seneca, on what is now Route 96 between Bushnell's Basin and Victor. It was this segment of the army, Selden said, that "scattered like frightened partridges" despite the commands of its officers, while the woods echoed with the Seneca cry "Sauqua, Sauqua."



If it hadn't been for French troops -- 3,000 Denonville against 600 Seneca -- Callieres would have been short-lived.

Lahonton, later to make literary history, was then busy counting the French wounded.

Henri de Tonty was chosen for the significant but unheralded campaign for two reasons; his courage, and his experience, which he'd gained from being LaSalle's close friend and right-hand man.

Stories about his fearlessness were legendary, and his knowledge of the New World probably outmatched LaSalle's because he went where angels and the explorer feared to tread.

A young French nobleman, Chevalier de Baugy, said he was one of the ablest and most trustworthy of the French coureurs in Denonville's campaign.

DeBaugy kept a journal while he was on the historic march to Boughton Hill. Its historic value wasn't recognized until 196 years later when it was printed as "DeBaugy's Journal." It can still be hunted up by historians in some well-stocked libraries.

To round out what the Rev. McNamara figuratively refers to as "the captains and the kings" who made up that distinguished army were Francois Chores D'Orvilliers and DuLhut, or DuLuth as he was later to be known.

According to DeBaugy's journal Duluth was a "famous coureur who made his reputation in the upper Great Lakes country."



Both an explorer and a French officer, he unfortunately never attained the public adulation of Champlain or LaSalle, but he was written up in letters to France by the Jesuits in the 1600's as "one of the most noted coureurs de bois of

this period." Which is saying a lot for a period when you had to be extraordinary to be "noted" at all.

The importance of these talented future headliners, DeBaugy wrote, indicated what importance Denonville and the French king placed on the campaign.

"D'Orvilliers," DeBaugy wrote from this region in his 17th Century diary, "had 400 men put under his command because of the great confidence felt in him."

Other letters written during that day, and compiled in the prestigious "Jesuit Relations," refer to him as "prominent . . . an old officer of great ability and very distinguished merit."

His full title was Francois Chorel d'Orvilliers, Sieur de St. Romain.

Another man, part of a campaign which was to go down in history, was La Durantaye, who gained his reputation as an explorer on the Upper Lakes. He competed with the English for what is now the Straits of Mackinac, between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron.

Father McNamara adds that, in addition to renowned explorers and statesmen-to-be, there were the great Mohawk Christian convert, Chief Kryn, and LaSalle's colleague, the Rev. Louis Hennepin, a Flemish Franciscan.

Prominent chaplains, who either furthered their country and faith's efforts, and-or died for them, were Abbe Francois Vachon de Belmont, and Jesuit missionaries Thierry Beschefer, Francois Valliant de Gueslis, Jean Enjalran, and Jacques Gravier.

The French word *coureur* literally meant hunter, but in those days any man who fought his way through the North American wilderness was playing with fate and immortality.

Champlain and La Salle made it. The men who put their lives on the line as they "took the fatal plunge into the hornet's nest of the five nations" of the Iroquois could have become equally famous, had luck and a good public relations man been on their side.

As it was, their historic deeds are known only to a few.

The most fantastic twist of fate was that each should have been brought together here for the march against the Seneca, in the 1600's.

Chief's Dream

Toward the end of his life, Grand Sachem Freeman Johnson, 82, chief of the once-mighty Seneca Indian nation, found his dreams centered around Boughton Hill, Victor.

Not the barren, wind-swept fields of Boughton Hill as it stands today. But a state park, reincarnating the fabulous 17th century capital of Gannagaro.

Johnson lived in the Town of Greece, northwest of Rochester, until his death. But the star-crossed Indian site he hoped would become a living monument to the Seneca's dramatic past is just south of Victor.

But both the chief and Boughton Hill are known to Indians throughout all North America -- the latter because of its significance to American history; the former because he championed its cause.



New York State has already purchased part of the more than 1,000-acre site to build a state park and, indirectly, made some of the old chief's dream come true.

Today, over 300 acres of what was once the setting for some of the country's most incredible history belong to the people of New York State -- with hopefully more to come.

What the completed park could represent hasn't even reached the drawing board stage. It lies in the repeated, fulsome dreams of an Indian who, with his bagful of disappointments, never passed the lonely site of his ancestor's finest hour without envisioning what it might become.



Some of Chief Johnson's dreams included:

(1) Restoration of more than 150 bark longhouses that fanned out on a hill which the Seneca were to make famous -- built upon the foundations of the 17th century structures, managed by locating the old post holes through excavation.

(2) Reconstruction of the immense storehouses and sweatlodges.

The latter were small enclosures which operated like Sauna baths. The Indians would build a fire, heat stones, pour water on the stones and absorb the steam to fight colds and fever.

(3) Reconstruction of the tiny 17th century Jesuit Chapel, St. James, which stood like a monument to Christianity and the Jesuit missionaries whose courage provoked the fierce respect of the mighty and feisty Seneca.

(4) Rebuilding of the intricate wood troughs (basswood) which gave the ill-fated capital a pipeline from the natural springs and America its first introduction to plumbing.

(5) Rebirth of the cornfields, so extensive that it took the French troops under the fanatical Denonville two days to burn them all.

Along with Indian corn (their own brand of white ears) would be crops of watermelons, and pumpkins beans (some of which form the now familiar succotash).

There would be a museum located ideally, according to archaeologist J. Sheldon Fisher, president of Gannagaro Assoc., at a spot where no historic building stood, at Boughton Hill Rd., and School St. The museum would be a homing place for the countless artifacts dug up over the years on the Boughton Hill site, many of which are currently under the protection of the Rochester Museum and Science Center.

(6) Monuments to the founders of the League of the Iroquois, which includes Deganawidah, the Peace Queen and Hiawatha.

(7) Plaques or monuments commemorating the famous explorers who visited Gannagaro-- the most notable, Robert Cavalier de La Salle.

(8) Pageants and dioramas telling the story of the Iroquois in general and Gannagaro in particular and the massive attack by the Marquis de Denonville; stories of famed Indians like Cornplanter, Red Jacket, Ely S. Parker, and others; the sacred significance of the Peace Queen, etc.

They would not be insignificant pageants, says Jane LeClair, adopted sister to the late chief, who, with him, envisioned some of the pageants comparable to the nearby Mormon Pageant staged near Palmyra.

The spot for this, Fisher said, would be near Fort Hill, where nature already has formed a natural bowl or amphitheater. Fort Hill, an alluvial fan geologically, is the palisaded area where the Seneca sent their women and children for protection when war broke out. This area would be restored. It's located one-half mile west of the four corners of Boughton Hill at Victor-Holcomb and Boughton Hill Rds.

(9) A cultural center was one of the old chief's most devout hopes -- one staffed with Indian and White men alike, versed in the true story of the Iroquois nations.

Sharing Sachem Johnson's dream in the center are countless others, including the National Congress of American Indians.

(10) Special dates when ceremonies would be re-enacted -- the tree planting ceremony in the Spring; the Denonville attack in July, etc.

(11) Excavation of the satellite villages (about 8 or 10) which surrounded the capital of Gannagaro in the same fashion that suburbs surround a larger city, but which are not within the proposed park limits.

(12) A reproduction or description of the lead plaques put up by the Marquis de Denonville on the fields of Gannagaro after his men's destruction there, claiming the land in the name of King Louis XIV of France. The furious Seneca later melted down the plaques for bullets.

(13) A community Indian motel or camp area adjacent to the park, where Indian visitors from across the country could stay at a minimal cost. Also a Travelers Aid Fund or Indian Red Cross for those Indians unable to afford the trip.

(14) A gift shop owned and operated by Indians where the once intricate handcraft could be recalled, without imitation or imports, and articles of museum quality such as beadwork, blankets, wood carvings, etc., could be sold.

(15) Indians trained and qualified to act as tourist guides and-or lecturers and to serve in other capacities throughout the park.

It is also the wish of those involved in the future park that Indians themselves be consulted on decisions toward the formation and carrying-on of the park. Some are highly qualified, such as Alvin Josephy of American Heritage Magazine, the author of "Custer Died For Your Sins," William Fenton and others.

(16) A complete story telling of the role of pawn played by the Seneca, who were used by the French to get at their English enemies in the New World.

It's believed that the tragic wiping out of the capital of Gannagaro was carried out only for this purpose. In a letter written to the French embassy by Denonville, he stated boldly that the "Indians must be crushed" because of their alliance with the English and their all-important trade-communication.

