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WAMPUM BELTS
Six Nations Show Treaty Granting Them Independent Sovereignty as Long as Sun Shines

By HOWARD MECELLAN

Of the Six Nations of the Iroquois, hidden from white men's eyes until the time of George Washing ton saw them at a treaty-making powwow, there is one fact of which the "Long House" of Iroquois Council Fire on the Onondaga reservation in the Mohawk Valley bears witness. For in an effort to ward off efforts to in vade the Iroquois country by the British, a group of eight belts on which are woven the heretofore record of wampum known as the Iroquois compresses the collection.

One belt, made in 1650, is the only documentary evidence of the existence of the League of Iroquois, which was before the present League of Nations at Geneva. It may seem odd that natives living in the midst of evidences of the superiority of the white man's civilization should decide to retain for most of the natives the claims of the older culture. But the aboriginal Iroquois, after centuries of association with the whites, still maintain a racial reverence for the potential institutions of their forefathers, and their treaty rights to the land and in spite of the undeniable insult to the Great Spirit of their elders. According to Indian tradition, interwoven with the history of the whites woven into the wampum belts prove their claims to the land inextricably, and guarantee their separation forever.

Carried to Washington

In their annual tour Peter Stuy vesant, Dutch Colonial Governor of New York, Sir William Johnson, British Colonial Indian Superintendent General Clinton, first Governor after the overthrow of the Revolution, and George Washington saw the Iroquois, and from that day the belts were never carried away with great ceremony. There were two Chief Louis, Sir Henri Ber d.John, Berd. Junior Keeper of the Wampum and Iroquois Prime Minister, was directed at a time to bring five to take them out, they took them off and carry them to Washington. Ten Iroquois, carrying the belt and the belts to the Capitol, where their Indian mode of dress led to the belief of the Indian bureau of Indian affairs.

They laid particular emphasis on the spirit of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, made in 1744, which, according to their traditions, gave to the Six Iroquois Nations and their Indian friends the Innu and Five Nations the perpetual right to live on their reservations in independent sover eigny, "never to be disturbed."

This provision the conservative of the Indian Moses, of the Mohawks, of the Cayugas, of Onondaga and Tuscarora, who composed the Iroquois, construed to mean that they never could be "blotted out," nor be im pressed. In a letter to Washington, George Washington, regretting that the League of Nations peace established by the Iroquois, the successor of the Mohawks, and the Iroquois nation to the Iroquois fire.

The Confederacy Belt was part of a collection used by the Iroquois in 1602 when they ceded their land to the British, to Dr. John de la Croyer, who, in the Iroquois, represented the Iroquois in the "wholly European." Two years after the Iroquois, made the same belt, made a treaty with the English, agreeing not to aid the New England Indians who had murdered a Mohawk chief.

The Belt of Law

The next oldest belt in the Belt of Law, two lines of purple wampum, running along the edge of the belt, made of wampum, established the law of the Iroquois, and the law of the white man. One line represents white man's law; the other Iroquois. They do not meet and are separated by "the rest of the world."" The white wampum, referring to the Iroquois that the two zeta of the world "must always be by themselves and never live intermixed, never intermingle, never connect their independence from the white man's law.

The original belt of the Six Nations, which announces the return of the belt, was finished about 1714, and records all previous treaties with the Iroquois, including the Six Nations. The Six Nations are present by step-purple wampum denoting the raising of each nation. At the lower left corner of the belt is a similar design which appears incomplete. It represents the white man's nation last appearing on the Iroquois' horizon. Each step in the purple design is represented by a small bar as a token that each nation, tribe and family is bound to the other in a faithful observance of all covenants made by the Six Nations.

"Of most importance to the pending citizenship controversy are the Belts of Peace and Friendship and the Belt of the Central Council Fire of Six Nations. They were completed in 1755 to mark the ratification of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the Thirteen States—the American treaty with the Iroquois by which the Indians sold large territory in return for their independence and the right to live on their reservations and "hunt and fish over the entire country, that ceded as well as retained, as long as the sun shines, the grass grows green and water flows down the river"—the Iroquois idea of eternity.

The political significance of the belt of the Central Council Fire is indicated by the almost solid purple. It does, in fact, record the most important political step ever taken by the Six Nations. The old wampum makers worked overtime to get it ready. General Washington had foresight in the history of the new American nation, and by this belt the Six Nations has tended to keep its friendly relations with the new white Government known as the Iroquois as "the Great Council of Thirteen Fire." It symbolizes the Six Iroquois politicians had in the infant nation and marks the disappearance of European nations from New England affairs.

Longest Belt of All

The longest belt, made entirely of white wampum and known as the Land Belt, describes the treaty provisions which made the Iroquois nation 65,000 acres in upper New York State for reservations. The solid white wampum means that the white man gave no place on the Indian land, but that the Indian has rights to hunt and fish everywhere.

To this day Iroquois nations claim the right to sit and hold the rights of Indians regardless of the white man's government. The belt states the facts of the reservation requirements. That is their ancient right under the Land Belt. Furthermore, the belt signifies that those reservations are not a political part of the United States and that the Indians on them are not wards of the State nor of the Federal Government, but "children of the Great White Father," an independent and separate from the jurisdiction of the United States as any European nation.

The two remaining belts in the group called Council Belts, are strings rather than belts. Though smaller than the others and representing less labor, they are almost as important. Technically they are perhaps more important, for they constitute the credentials which empowered the Council Belt to sit, they represent the legal authority for their deliberations, and describe in what manner a new chief may be selected and how a dead one must be succeeded. Of course, this basic importance to the Six Nations.

It was months before Dr. Bates of Cornell has identified all the readings and translations of the political belts. He did not require to make each belt and it is almost that long to read them—a task which only a patient red man could thoroughly enjoy.