

## ***The Unconscious Influence of the Seven Nations in Kahnawake:***

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After looking over the current draft MCK community charter, I noticed an illustrated diagram which again suggests that Kahnawake's "traditional government" under the Kaianere'kó:wa (Great Law of Peace) was dissolved by the imposition of a new Indian Act government in 1889. Indeed this traditional government spoken of was not an institution of the Kaianere'kó:wa, but rather the government of the so-called Seven Nation of Canada alliance; which is sometimes referred to as the "other Iroquois Confederacy". This oversight and confusion reflects many influences the Seven Nations government continues to have over present-day Kahnawake, and the need for a greater understanding of our history.

Perhaps some historical insight into the Seven Nations is required to adequately portray the gravity of this commentary. The Seven Nations of Canada was a union of federated indigenous communities in what was then known as Upper Canada around the 1760's. It consisted of groups of Abenaki, Algonquin, Iroquois, Huron, and, Nipissing who were allied with New France before its conquest by Britain. Among the Iroquois in this political alliance were the three so-called "praying Indian" townships of Akwesasne, Kanehsatake, and Kahnawake. During that time and up until the 1884 Indian Advancement Act was imposed on March 5, 1889, an institution sometimes referred to as the Life Chiefs governed Kahnawake. This council of chiefs operated similarly to that of Haudenosaunee governance, but accommodating the needs and requirements of the other parties in the federation.

According to the 1890 New York State census on the Six Nations, evidence suggests that the St. Regis Mohawks (Ahkwasahró:non) had become restored into the Iroquois Confederacy in 1888, presumably to reestablish the same Six Nations that had made treaties and compacts with the United States government. Therefore, by rekindling the Mohawk Nation Council Fire in the New York portion of Akwesasne, the Confederacy now had the lawful ability to argue claims inherent to the Six Nations in its entirety. When this momentous act was committed, some historians doubt that the leaders at this time recognized the significance of this event and went about governance as usual. Enter the Indian Act of Canada.

After much resistance towards the imposition of the Indian Act, the alliance crumbled; leaving only the three Mohawk townships somewhat socially connected. In Kahnawake, the Life Chiefs Council continued to exist after the imposition of the Indian Act Band Council. However, it was no longer supported by the majority of Kahnawa'kehró:non, probably because it was not recognized by the Indian Agent who was the envoy of Canada's fiduciary responsibility. Indeed, conformity is nothing new in Kahnawake as any community member who didn't want problems with the Indian Agent had to conform to this new system of governance.

Late in the 1920's, Kahnawake had begun to develop an interest in relearning Long House teachings and the Kaianere'kó:wa from other Haudenosaunee communities; particularly Grand River. It has been suggested that this newfound interest was motivated by border crossing cases that used a legal defense strategy based upon the sovereign integrity of the Mohawk Nation. According to a article published in the Montreal Gazette in 1927, a new Long House was built in Kahnawake to host a Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee, an effort perhaps to reinstate Kahnawake back into the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy; although there are some who believe that an underground contingent of Long House people maintained a political relationship with the Confederacy throughout Kahnawake's sabbatical from the homeland. However, aside from word of mouth, not much evidence exists to support this theory.

Soon after the reintroduction of the Kaianere'kó:wa and the teachings of the Long House, Chiefs were raised in the three Mohawk townships; an act so eagerly done or misunderstood, that many duplications and even triplications of titles were raised. This eventually created a greater confusion along with the fact that many in

that generation adapted with adjusting to the Kaianere'kó:wa by replacing unknown structural elements with elements that were used by the Seven Nations government. Even some of the Life Chiefs of the Seven Nations government were raised as condeoled titleholders in the Mohawk Nation Council of the Haudenosaunee.

In the 1950's and 1960's, a new generation of Long House followers emerged from Christian exile and navigated the nationalist course of the Haudenosaunee at Kahnawake to autopilot ever since; and likewise became both a rival and an alternative to the Band Council system. This rivalry continues to exist today and the concept of Mohawk nationalism has spread like wildfire since. While being still somewhat new to the Haudenosaunee way of life, Long Houses in the three Mohawk townships modeled their council according to the political arrangement and structure of their national council; as no provision is made in any version of the Kaianere'kó:wa regarding the structure of community or village councils.

We hear fragments of history and wishful interpretations that attempt to recreate history with a happy ending, but only add to the confusion. For example, this author has heard from time to time that Kahnawake is the central fire of the Mohawk Nation. Indeed it may have been the capital of the Seven Nation's government, but evidence suggests the rekindling of the Mohawk Nation Council Fire to be in Akwesasne.

Another example of confusion is leadership selection; whereas Kahnawake has always asserted that the selection of leaders within a clan should be chosen according to who in the clan is best qualified, as opposed to adding the element of heredity into the equation. This author believes that our selection process derives from the similar way the Seven Nation government selected its leaders, whereby leadership was not associated with any specific title. Although it is somewhat hard to decipher and practice a hereditary system today in Kahnawake, heredity plays a huge part in the selection process in almost all other Haudenosaunee communities who had always maintained some kind of political relationship with each other.

The Kanien'kehá:ka have a rich history composed of both good and bad elements, but these aspects should not be hidden and disregarded; they should be studied so that similar mistakes and misunderstanding will not be made again. As Kahnawake now moves forward towards the future, the issue of governance still provides division and confusion, although Kahnawake does seem to know what it wants. Unfortunately everyone has a different idea on how to get there. Perhaps when concepts of open mindedness and tolerance are truly grasped by our people, we may find a way to be all on the same page. By thoroughly researching and studying where we came from, it's easier to decide on where we want to go; thus untying this tangled knot of confusion.

Ever onward towards the good tidings of peace and power!