

Readings from the Archives

[These were the documents read out at the Land Symposium event on 26 October 2013 by Amanda Hill.

They are all held at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and photocopies of them are available in the Deseronto Archives.]

As archivists we know that historical records may not always tell us absolute truths, but they can give us insights into people's views on the world and on each other which can be informative.

Today I want to read you some extracts from the interactions between the Government and the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte to illustrate the nature of that relationship and how it changed over time.

This is a relationship that goes back a long way, but I'm focussing on the fifty years after the American Revolution, when some of the Mohawk people settled in this part of Ontario, having lost their lands in the Mohawk Valley.

I'll start with a literal translation of extracts from a speech by one of the Mohawk leaders, Captain Joseph Brant which he made to Lieutenant Governor Frederick Haldimand on 27 May 1783

"Brother – you have books and records of our mutual treaties and engagements which will confirm the truth of what I have been telling and as we are unacquainted with the art of writing we keep it fresh in our memory by belts of wampum deposited in our Council House at Onondaga

"...when a few years after the conquest of Canada your people in this country thought themselves confined on account of their numbers, with regard to the scarcity of land, we were applied to for giving up some of ours, and fix a line or mark between them and us. We considered upon it and relinquish'd a great territory to the King for the use of his subjects for a trifling consideration merely as a confirmation

of said act and as a proof of our sincere regard towards them. This happened so late as the year 1768 at Fort Stanwix....

We expected a permanent brotherly love and amity would be the consequence, but in vain! The insatiable thirst for power was the next object of satisfaction to the king's subjects on the sea coast."

LAC, MG 21, Vol. 21, C-11893, pp.235-244

This is part of a letter from Haldimand to Lord North, one of the joint leaders of the British Parliament, written on 2 June 1783:

"I have to acquaint your Lordship that the Six Confederate Nations of Indians, having had Information of the Provisional Treaty with America, deputed Joseph Brant and John the Mohawk (two Indians who have much distinguished themselves during the War) to Quebec, in order to be made acquainted by me with the Articles of the Treaty, and the Truth of the Reports which had been spread amongst them... I own that I was much embarrassed and wished to have it in my Power to talk to them with more certainty than I could, of the measures which Government intended to take for their Security and Welfare. These Indians have great merit and sufferings to plead in the Cause of Great Britain; it will be a difficult task, after what has happened, to convince them of our Good Faith, they seem particularly hurt that no mention is made of them in the Treaty. ..

Actions, not words, can make Impression on them, I have therefore dispatched Major Holland, the Surveyor General of the Province, to Lake Ontario, to examine into the state of the old French Post at Cataraqui and to survey the North side of the Lake as I will endeavour to prevail upon the Mohawks to settle there provided the Country contiguous to it should be found propitious. Joseph Brant and John the Mohawk are returned with Him....Affairs with the Indians are in a very critical situation....I will consider myself as peculiarly fortunate if I can by the command with which I am honored, be

instrumental in alleviating the distresses and in procuring the means of subsistence for men who have been deprived of everything on account of their loyalty to the King”

LAC, MG 21, Vol. ADD. MSS. 21716, A-662, pp. 40-43

Lord North replied to Haldimand on 8th August 1783 (two months later: government moved very slowly in 1783!)

“The King...much approves of your having sent Major Holland to inspect into the state of the Post at Cataraqui and to survey the North side of Lake Ontario, as well as of your intention to carrying into execution your endeavour to prevail upon the Mohawks to settle to the Northward of that Lake, provided the country should be found well suited for their convenience. These people are justly entitled to our peculiar attention and it should be far from either generous or just in us, after our cession of their territories and hunting grounds to forsake them. I am, therefore, authorised to acquaint you, that the King allows you to make those offers to them, or to any other nations of the friendly Indians, who may be desirous of withdrawing themselves from the United States and occupying any lands which you may allot to them within the Province of Quebec. It is to be hoped that from thence they will be able to carry on their hunting on their former grounds, and return with their furs and peltry where the British traders can meet them, with their wives and children, in security, and being under our protection, their attachment to His Majesty may continue and the country may enjoy the advantages of their trade. In the assortment of presents to be sent out to you for these people you will find a supply of tools and implements of cultivation, which it is judged will be useful in the formation of their new settlements in case they avail themselves of the offers which you may make to them.”

LAC, MG 21, Vol. ADD. MSS. 21710, H-1435, pp. 139-147

Major John Ross, who was in charge of settling the Loyalist refugees, wrote from Cataraqui on the 3rd November 1783 to Captain Robert Mathews, Haldimand’s military secretary

“The lands have been purchased from the Mississaugas... which (up the Lake) extends about forty five miles. I sent some officers of the Garrison to explore the country they report that the lands in general are of a most excellent quality, easily cleared and intersected with rivers on which are several falls where mills can conveniently be erected.

I am much obliged to His Excellency for the order on Carleton Island for Rum. Such is the nature of the Indians here that if their services are wanted they are exceedingly covetous, but if they are not employed, seldom ask for any thing. As the latter is mostly the case at present, a very small quantity of rum or provisions will satisfy them, both which shall be managed with the greatest economy. Indeed of late I have greatly weaned them from both and without any discontent. This nation in peaceable times will be of very little expense to Government.”

LAC, MG 21, Vol. ADD. MSS. 21786, H-1452, pp. 138-139

Now I’m going to jump forward a little in time, to September 1800 when there was a Council meeting of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte. During the course of that meeting, John Deserontyon reminisced about the day that he led the Mohawks to their new lands on Bay:

“We arrived here on the 22nd of May and found a great number of the native Missassagas at this place who were very glad to see us and we were happy to be met in so friendly a manner. We then held a Council with the Mississaugas and informed them our great Father had purchased these lands for us, and that we had come to sit down on them. I told them the King’s people were also coming to inhabit this Country which the Mississaugas had sold to the Crown. We told them also that the people who were coming to settle among us were bringing cattle and other stock and we hoped they would not disturb them or do them any damages.”

So the Mohawks arrived here in May 1784. Just two months afterwards, on 29 July 1784, Captain John wrote to Daniel Claus, the Superintendent of the Six Nations Indians in the following terms:

“You doubtless remember that I have said in a letter to you that we should be glad to have our land measured as soon as possible ... in order to have a patent of the land, for the Loyalists would try to get some of our land. It now comes to pass as I thought, Major Holland & his son were here yesterday, for to get some land from us for the Loyalists , but I could not spare of any, besides that Sir John & I have fixed the boundaries etc. Please sir to hasten affairs for to help us concerning a Charter of our land”

LAC, MG 19, F1, C-1478, Vol. 4, p.49

24 December 1791 – extract of the minutes of the Land Board of Niagara

“The Chairman presented Mr Jones’s survey of the lands in the Grand River promised to Indians of the Mohawk Nation, also a sketch of the tract assigned to Captain John and others at the Bay of Quinte. The committee having considered the whole are humbly of opinion that as the faith of Government is pledged to the Mohawk Chiefs for the two tracts mentioned above, every precaution ought to be taken to preserve them in the quiet possession and property of them and the Committee submit that an Act of the Provincial Legislature or a grant under the great seal of the Province be made in favour of the principal Chiefs on behalf of their nation’s persons in trust for them forever”

LAC, RG 10, Vol. 8, p.8209

14 October 1809 John Deserontyon to Francis Gore, Lieutenant Governor

“I am under the necessity of addressing you on behalf of the Mohawk Indians settled in the Bay of Quinty. Last year we sold some staves and timber off our lands, in the hopes it would have been of service to us, and particularly to the old people who are no longer able to work, and also to such among

us who are poor. The contrary effect has been produced, several of the people who had bought the timber went off without paying us and what was paid to us was made use of as the means of introducing quantities of spirituous liquors among us which has kept us in a continual state of trouble, not to say warfare. No benefit whatever has been derived from it and the quantity of timber destroyed exceeds vastly what has been taken away: indeed the destruction is beyond description. It has since been explained to me that from the conditions upon which we hold our lands from His Majesty we have not a right to dispose of the timber or any part of the property, nor by any means directly or indirectly to introduce the white people among us. In consequence of which I have refused any application that has since been made to me for the purchase of timber and I foresee that were we permitted to dispose of the timber, it would do as much harm than good, besides the impropriety of acting contrary to His Majesty's intention. A party among us have however taken upon themselves, notwithstanding all my endeavours to the contrary, to parcel out the lands and to dispose of the timber and are now daily doing so, to one person alone they have sold four miles square and who openly declares that he will hold it against all the authority your Excellency can produce. Should their sales be permitted the whites will obtain a footing among us from which they may not be easily driven and the mischief they do us by bringing so great quantities of spirituous liquors among us; added to which by cutting so great quantity of timber our woods will be rendered impossible our hunting ruined and our descendants be left to starve. There are now a very great number of whites among us who are either actually at work cutting down timber or are building houses for the winter or proposing so to do.

The persons who have taken the lead and are active in this business is principally a John Loft. His father was a Stockbridge Indian, and a soldier in the Royal Yorkers, his mother the daughter of Dutch parents, so that he has not the most distant claim as one of the Six Nations. The others are Mohawks of the name of Hill, persons who did not adhere to His Majesty during the Rebellion which drove us from our

Country, but adhered to the American Rebels and never came to this Country until all their lands were sold to the American governor.”

LAC, RG 10, Vol. 3, C-10996, pp.1041-1044

5 March 1819 Letter from John Ferguson, Resident Agent of Indian Affairs at Kingston, to William Claus, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs

“It cannot be expected that these people will ever be quiet or united or assent to the views of that Government they are so much beholden to unless some steps are taken to detach them from their white advisors and to send off the lumber men who have great influence with them, particularly the opposing party ... whose intent it is to prevent their lands being surrendered to Government”

LAC, RG 10, Vol. 36, C-11011, pp.20694-20697

John Ferguson, 10th July 1819 to Major Bowles, secretary to the Commander of the Forces, Kingston

“I have received instructions from the Superintendent of Indian Affairs ...to effect a second purchase of land from the Mohawk Indians and as these people are always dilatory in their deliberations, it will be necessary to give them some Provisions and Liquor. May I beg to know if His Grace the Commander of the Forces will sanction their having a few Rations, not exceeding one hundred and twenty, and five gallons of Rum”

LAC, RG 10, Vol. 489, C-18340, p.29538

John Ferguson, 12th March 1820

“There are yet Lumber Men upon their Land, which is another source of discord among them. When I was last at Belleville, John Simpson applied to me, to allow him to take timber off, saying he had a few pieces remaining of a purchase he made last year. I told him to apply to His Excellency Sir Peregrine Maitland thro’ you, and forbad him touching it until he had obtained the necessary permission. Since when, instead of a few pieces, he has drawn out an immense quantity of timber and staves...

I have been informed by several of the Indians, and by a respectable inhabitant, that Old Adam Von (a ...negro) and a white man who lives with him, have been exceedingly active in their endeavours to dissuade the Indians from parting with any part of their land to Government. These two sell spirits and when they get the Indians intoxicated, persuade them to what they please.”

LAC, RG 10, Vol. 490, C-13340, pp.29650-29651

Sir John Colborne, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, 3 May 1829

“It appears, I think, that a considerable decrease in the expense of the establishment of the Indian Department may be effected in a few years, if the course which has been pursued with the Missisauagas of the Credit should be observed with other tribes.

Under the superintendence of attentive resident agents, civilization may be extended to the whole of the Indians of the Province, and a fund created for their future support by granting leases of their lands and selling part of them

We have been involved, for many years, in a system which has occasioned an enormous expense without conferring any benefit on the Indians, or insuring their friendship. A great effort will now, I hope, be made to ameliorate their condition and to place their children under zealous instructors...

...Mr Clench, Clerk and interpreter may be placed in charge of the Mohawks and Mississagas of the Bay of Quinte and Rice Lake

These...superintendents should be actively employed in collecting the Indians in Villages and inducing them to cultivate their lands and divide them into lots. They should encourage them to send their children to the schools which will be prepared for their reception...

...It is...highly important to let the Indians feel that they are indebted to our Government for the benefits which may be expected to result from establishing schools and appointing religious teachers, and that all improvements proceed from us.”

LAC, RG 10, Vol. 15 C-10997, pp.2109-2119

I hope that's given you a little bit of a glimpse into what life was like for the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte in their early years here in Ontario, and also a glimpse into the attitudes of the men who they were dealing with in the Government and the way they were changing over time. Thank you for listening!