

# IROQUOIS FEAST OF THE DEAD: NEW STYLE\*

by

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In October 1956 a three day ceremony, authorized by the Ohsweken group of the Grand Council of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, was led by senior chiefs from the Six Nations Reservation, Ohsweken, Ontario, Canada, assisted by Iroquois chiefs from several other places in Canada and the U.S.A. The ceremony was a burial ritual which included the Feast of the Dead, to reconsecrate the bones of two prehistoric ossuaries (1) which had been discovered during building excavations at Tabor's Hill, Scarborough Township, Ontario. (2) This procedure was unusual for several reasons.

First, earlier mention of ossuary burial and consecration is limited (Jesuit Relations *ibid*; Sagard, 1939, and Champlain ed., Biggar, 1929). As far as the writer is aware this historic Huron ceremony has not been conducted since the middle of the seventeenth century, and this is the first time that a reburial has taken place. Judging from the early literature, the Hurons and Iroquois were hereditary enemies. The Hurons were never part of the Five Iroquois Nations (now, since the inclusion of the Tuscarora Nation, the present Six Nations), nor were the Iroquois Nations ever part of the Hurons. These two were regarded by early explorers and missionaries as two ethnic groups separated by dialect and by cultural idiom -- namely burial rites. The large ossuary type

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burial was not known to the Iroquois Nations (3) but was practised by some outside tribes including the Hurons. Thus we have an unsuspecting group of Iroquois gathered with full contemporary regalia carrying out the Iroquois Feast of the Dead ceremony in the foreign context of a Huron ossuary. (4) The Iroquois semi-annual Feast of the Dead is conducted at the time of the traditional camp moves (Fenton and Kurath, 1951, p. 143-45). Therefore the Iroquois believed the ossuaries to be an Iroquois burial site. This fusion may prove to be the prototype for future burial ceremonies.

Second, as the present-day Feast of the Dead is still a sacred ceremony, non-Iroquois are excluded. Speck and Fenton and Kurath are possibly the only ones who have witnessed and recorded it. On the present occasion the ritual was organized by the Ohsweken group, part of the Six Nations Confederacy. The three day ceremonial was partially financed and stimulated by Scarborough Township officials who saw the advantages of dedicating a proposed metropolitan park in a suitable fashion. As will be seen from the description below, the reburial ceremony was organized around the requirements of a rural park inauguration.

Third, the rapidity with which the Iroquois-Township ceremony was organized was remarkable. Within eight weeks, approximately two hundred Iroquois from nine localities in Canada and the United States, took part in the ceremony viewed by 2,000 non-Indian visitors. The press, twenty-seven strong, was represented by all kinds of publications from Life Magazine to small village newspapers. Radio, television and film units were on hand. The Dominion Government was represented by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration (also Superintendent General of Indian Affairs), the Provincial Government by the Minister of Travel and Publicity, and local federal and provincial parliamentary members.

Fourth, an important development was the change in attitude of many of the Iroquois participants during the three day ceremonies. Some persons from Ohsweken as well as some from

other reservations and towns were pleased to come and take part in the rituals. "It is the decision of the Council of Chiefs," they said. Others were resentful and in open disagreement on the point of allowing non-Iroquois to be present. In the circumstances these persons were persuaded to present a unified front as Iroquois members. They considered themselves as "Indians" and ranged themselves spontaneously together vis-à-vis the "whites." Such expressions as "it is our tradition," and "... came from our forefathers," etc., were heard. A number of Christian Iroquois were present and these also were members of the Confederacy for the occasion. At first there had been a fairly general feeling of diffidence and unwillingness on the part of many to be separated out as "Indians" (many came in European style clothing and failed to register as Indian guests of the Township.) As the ceremonies proceeded and were accorded an unusual amount of publicity and enthusiasm by the crowds of spectators, the Iroquois people gradually assumed a conscious pride in their identity with this age-old ritual. At the beginning several Iroquois expressed resentment at the public nature of their ritual. Later they began to express the spontaneous conviction that the ceremony would become an annual event at Tabor's Hill. They volunteered to do the dances again for the benefit of many visitors who had missed them the night before. The rapid and overwhelming acceptance of "Indian custom and belief" was fundamental to the change in their behaviour. (5)

The emphasis in this paper will be on the rituals as a contemporary event representing a composite Iroquois-Township ceremony. It will deal with the attitudes and factions involved and the development of an Iroquois and "White" solidarity.

## ORGANIZATION

The ossuary was discovered and reported about August 17th, at which time the Provincial health authorities advised an investigation of these human bones. The Scarborough Township Reeve called in an official of the Royal Ontario

Museum of Archaeology to investigate. Upon the latter's assurance of the importance of the dual ossuary discovery, the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board was approached in order that they might protect the site. The Minister of Travel and Publicity was contacted by long distance telephone and took the decision to preserve the site. Within two days of the Reeve's knowledge of the find, the site had been declared a prohibited area. The contractor was given an equivalent piece of ground elsewhere in the township, "It represents an investment of a quarter of a million dollars", he said. The Reeve telephoned the office of the Indian Superintendent of the Six Nations Reservation to see if anyone would be qualified to perform an ancient burial ceremony. The secretary of the elective council expressed his personal opinion (which did not necessarily represent that of the council), that no one on the reservation would be qualified to perform such a ceremony. When queried later about this, the secretary stated that the local newspaper had telephoned him to this effect, and his reply had been much as the Reeve's office reported. As a result of the news story in the local paper, four chiefs journeyed to Scarborough to inform the Reeve of their willingness to perform the ceremony.

Within two weeks the local officials were prepared, and made their first trip to Ohsweken. It was decided in the Grand Council at the Onondaga Long House that the ceremony would be performed. (6) The meeting followed the usual procedure, commencing about ten a.m. and lasting until three p.m. Almost the only words of English throughout were at the conclusion when it was announced to the Reeve "it will be done." It was also decided that the Reeve's executive assistant be given the position of honorary secretary of the Council in order to communicate with all other members of the Confederacy. This official made trips to the reservation to conclude plans for the combined ceremonials and to help the Iroquois with any problems of organization which might lie outside of their experience. On his fourth trip to Ohsweken, it was proposed that the Reeve and he would be adopted into the

Iroquois Confederacy. (7) A Mohawk chief proposed the adoption, it was replied to by a Cayuga chief and the Onondagas made the decision. The Council was asked to delay their ceremony from the sixth of October until the nineteenth, in order to give the Scarborough officials time to complete all arrangements.

The Township Council voted the sum of \$500 to cover expenses which was over spent by \$150. In addition, Mr. Spencer Clark, proprietor of the Guild Inn, put up \$600 to help meet the running expenses. All Iroquois from the Six Nations were invited to attend, transportation being supplied for all those coming from Ohsweken. The Westhill Motel owners were approached to make donations of sleeping accommodation. About twenty of them donated approximately thirty double bedrooms free of charge, and in addition provided all Iroquois participating or visiting with accommodation at one half the usual rate. On the second evening dinner was given to two hundred and forty persons, including "chiefs and other dignitaries" at the Scarborough Golf Club, half the cost of which was supplied by the Scarborough Golf Club, and half by the Scarborough Council. Luncheon on the third day was supplied for the same number by the Council of Scarborough and the Westhill Motel owners.

#### DESCRIPTION OF CEREMONIES

The interest of this paper is in the combined nature of the organization i.e., Iroquois-Township. Almost from beginning to end the ceremony was organized for the particular occasion. Parts of it were a faithful reproduction of the Feast of the Dead, the semi-annual ritual which is carried out at the time of moving camp, and has been carefully recorded and described elsewhere (Fenton & Kurath, 1951). But it is in fact a "new" ritual which represents two widely differing groups and their equally divergent values. On the one side, the performers of the rituals are explicitly dedicated to the religious revival of the Long House way of life and its necessary correlative, the development of political autonomy

within Canadian territory. On the other, the township officials were interested in any reasonable publicity which would draw favourable attention to their growing community. They were desirous of promoting an authentic ritual and were meticulous in preserving the atmosphere and detail of the ethnic ceremonies.

October 19, 1956. At two p.m. a Mohawk chief arrived at the site along with his official party. It was at the top of Tabor's Hill, a flattened area some fifty yards in diameter, which had been cordoned off by police from the group of visitors. From a large woodpile which had been prepared and supplied by township workmen, the chief and his small party gathered wood for his ritual tobacco-burning fire. Some consultation took place between the Iroquois and the township officials and workmen. A small tipi-type fire was prepared by the chief's runner, around which gathered the party of eight. A windscreen was held by the chief's wife and a Cayuga clan matron. The group formed around the windward side of the fire in a semicircle -- from left to right in the following order: the chief who recited the prayer, with a "warrior" behind; the two women, the firetender, another "warrior" (Ojibwa who had been adopted into a Cayuga clan by "chief" Howard Skye), and the two young sons of the chief's runner. There was no stated precedence about the numbers or composition of the group. It was performed by members of the vanguard, as the main group of Iroquois were to arrive by bus the following day. As the ceremony began, the township workmen moved away. The Mohawk chief gave the prayer with eyes lowered, and spoke in a low monotone which was scarcely audible outside of the participating group. He held a split-wood basket containing tobacco in its brown paper folding,<sup>(8)</sup> and several times during his speech carefully put small amounts of tobacco into the fire. Meanwhile the fire was kept and tended by one person. All members kept their eyes lowered, sometimes looking at the fire. The speech lasted for twenty minutes or more, <sup>(9)</sup> after which the chief's wife consulted with her husband who thereupon gave the basket to her. She made a short speech in

English and presented it to the Reeve to be given to his wife. This concluded the official ritual for the day. The group were later taken around the University of Toronto archaeological excavation at the nearby village site.

Although the burning of sacred tobacco was scheduled for the following morning at the site, it was not performed. Instead it had been held secretly the previous evening. The participants explained that this change took place because of the desire to "placate" and "satisfy" the spirits for the intrusion of the "whites" at the sacred ritual. "We pacified the spirits yesterday." And it was held privately "... so that they (the spirits) might not be angry when the white people do not behave properly tomorrow."

October 20, 1956. At nine a.m. a few of the officials arrived at the site on Tabor's Hill. A Cayuga man seemed to be in charge of the early part of the organization. He prepared long poles for Plains-type tipis to be erected near the feast fire. (He styled himself "chief" to the reporters, and when queried about it replied that he was a "pine tree chief"). He was assured about procedure and was willing to explain ideology and procedure to foreigners at length. "We do a lot to hold up tradition." Asked if he had ever participated in a Feast of the Dead with the ossuary before, he replied, "Yes, I have. I can't remember how long ago it was now, perhaps twenty-five years... (ago), at the Bay of Quinte." "How can you remember the ceremony if it is performed so seldom?" "We remember it," and "we do not need to rehearse. You do not rehearse communion," and "we know." (10) Information from other Iroquois visitors and participants varied as to the number of times it was performed. "Every Sunday." "We don't meet on Sunday"; "We haven't got a Sunday"; "on New Year's day -- our new year isn't your new year, ours goes according to the moon." "We have no new year, we perform the ceremony four times a year according to the seasons -- this is our duty." "It's traditional, always has been done this way." "We have performed this ceremony since prehistoric times." "We have

it from several speakers." "No, we never rehearse the dances, we remember them." "When I hear the music (drum), I know the dance." "We all understand the same way, we are all Iroquois." "We have no book of rituals, we remember." A Christian Iroquois woman, trying to justify the rituals with Christian teaching, explained, "the ceremony is not an act of friendship but we carry out the necessary sacraments, there is a complete cycle from birth and marriage to death."

For the first hour, people moved around speaking and renewing acquaintance with persons from other places, always speaking in an Iroquois language. Occasionally a non-Iroquois speaking Indian tried to remember his own language and found he was speaking to someone from a different tribe. Most of the younger children also spoke in Iroquois. The Cayuga man prepared the feast fire by suspending a horizontal pole over it supported by two X-shaped stakes driven into the ground. By ten o'clock most of the Iroquois had arrived, some having driven all night to arrive in time for the ceremony. Visitors who were gathering rapidly were kept well back from the summit of the hill.

The costumes varied in many combinations from European dress and feathered bonnets, to completely Indian (fringed buckskin jacket and leggings, moccasins and feather bonnet). Most people wore shoes or manufactured moccasins, and the men trousers of European pattern. A few wore breechcloths with leather, suede or buckskin leggings, most of whom also wore some kind of buckskin jacket. Only the major officials wore the Iroquois type headdress, i.e., a felt skull cap supporting a single vertical feather and one or more lying downwards. The majority of the men wore the full Plains-type headdress. The women for the most part wore long buckskin or white doeskin fringed dresses, and some wore narrow leggings creased at the front. A few wore one feather in a beaded headband. A few men and women appeared in European style clothing, the women in suits or dresses with fur capes. Many of the skin jackets had clan symbols, including turtle, wolf and bear. Some persons "forget to put it on." Explaining some of their



costumes, some remarked, "no, this isn't Iroquois, this is just my own idea." "I got this costume from somebody else, maybe they could explain to you what it means - I don't know;" "It's just, you know, I like it." Some embellishments were just "to please myself." The people were well aware what was "... for real," and what was "just so." And even more clearly they stated it was "for you," and "just for the tourist you know, they like a lot of that."

A township truck with two workmen arrived at the site to bring the corn soup and the beef which had been cut up previously. Two large iron cauldrons (one of which belonged to the Onondaga Long House and the other to a chief's wife) were unloaded by township officials who placed them on the fire, suspending them by hooks from the horizontal pole. The Cayuga "chief" who had been preparing poles helped in this, stirring the soup and taking out bits of ash and coals. A chief's wife also assisted in this. The former then took a shovel and at a distance of about fifty feet from the fire, marked out an oval-shaped space for the grave, about twelve feet by eight. Six chiefs together began to dig the pit. It was explained that normally this was done by members of one clan, but as many of the people were strangers, and as they did not know the clan affiliation of the dead, it was best to represent them by several different clan and tribal members. Workers changed often. It was difficult digging in the hard packed loam and clay. When the pit neared five feet in depth, the members of the press stepped in and volunteered to finish the job. When the pit was completed, the Iroquois gathered around it, all other visitors and observers being moved back by the police officials. The senior Onondaga chief stood at the western edge of the pit to deliver his prayer, flanked by the elder women and surrounded by the chiefs and others. The Reeve stood at the opposite end of the pit with a microphone. Several chiefs and helpers then proceeded to carry the bones in wooden crates (11) down into the pit to be dumped. The packing was taken out and carried up with the boxes. When the bones had been carefully piled

in the centre of the pit, two wolf pelts were laid out flat on them. (12) A township official announced over the public address system that this was a sacred occasion to the Indians and perfect quiet and decorum should be observed during the prayer. The Onondaga chief spoke for about twenty-five minutes. He was an elderly blind man who stood with a cane. His voice however was loud and strongly punctuated. He spoke with great energy. The substance of his speech, which was translated mostly by one of the young women, follows (13):

"Today, as is the will of the Great Spirit, our Creator, that all matters are to lay in the hands of the Confederate Chiefs. They are to be the supreme head of all the people of the Indian Nation. When the New Mind of Peace and Power arrive, they foresaw in the coming generations, that since the lives of the people are not everlasting, and in case of death in a family, there shall be two parties to the Confederate Council Fire, the Three Brethren and the Four Brethren, and whichever side free of mourning is responsible to condole with the mourning brethren, and to encourage them to carry on their tasks. It is up to these brethren, free of mourning, to carry out the necessary sacraments.

"On this day, we are to hold what we call the Great Feast of the Dead. We will now hear the voice of the Confederate Chiefs. Harken, everyone present, we are gathered in this particular place, the ancient resting place, of our forefathers, no doubt it is that we on the face of the earth were derived from these ancestors. Here lies the resting place of our ancient fathers and mothers. Here, we the children of such forefathers think about these remains with great enthusiasm. The sorrow is great in our minds. Each and everyone of us are heading in this same direction since life is not everlasting, so we should

hold a steady mind and great forbearance, not to let this great sorrow bear too heavily on our minds. We should now transfer our minds to the remaining people. We are to turn their interest to the way of our Creator and to carry on as the Great Spirit wishes. Let your minds thus remain.

"Now to you, whose remains lie before us, to you, our ancient brothers and sisters, our minds are heavy, having lost our dear ones, in whom our minds were entrusted. It is very painful to the heart to lose these dear ones in reminiscence. Hold your heads high and don't let your sorrows interfere with your thoughts. Here, the minds of the remaining people are entrusted in those whom you may call your brothers. The New Message and the teachings of our Creator are the main objects to be followed henceforward. So let your minds thus remain.

"Now, we shall direct our voice to the resting places of our many friends. Our Creator so created in our minds that we should possess love for one another. So as your thoughts are thus, meditating, your losses and grief. Once again we reassure you to withhold your minds and not let your grief overcome your thoughts. Let your minds be instilled in the lives of the remaining generation. Entrust your minds in the teachings and the Good Message of our Creator, since the Indian Race as a whole have lost one of their relatives. So let your minds remain thus.

"We now direct our voices to you, whose remains lie before us. To you, to whom we say, 'our forefathers', we know not the cause of your death, you who lie before us; perhaps your death may have been from sickness or some other cause. We the remaining generation are left totally at sea and know nothing of the

cause of your death. We are quoting what our forefathers said.

"Once again we direct our voices to those who are present. We have completed this ceremony to the best of our ability. The Confederate Chiefs have spoken, they have advised you on how you are to live in the days to come.

"Now to everyone present at this gathering, we have all been taken by surprise and astonishment at this unusual event. It is all we can do to look upon the bones and remains of our forefathers. There is but a remainder of two piles of bones. So as will happen, we will take a last view of these remains. Meanwhile, place yourself in a position similar to this and try to imagine taking a last view of yourself, as there is a day to come when you shall take this form. As will happen, the chiefs will commence the viewing, then next the chiefs' officers, matrons of the women, and then the rest of the people are to pay their last respects. The mourning group is to pay their respects last of all.

"Now that we have all reviewed the bones of our forefathers, we must bear in mind that this is the last and final view.

"Harken! Now that we all have reviewed these remains, we shall now arrange for the reburial. The last journey of our forefathers is near at hand, so listen closely, everyone who has followed the remains of our ancestors thus far. It is the will of the Creator, that the people on earth are to respectfully take care of the passing of loved ones and friends. This was his will.

"Listen, O, Creator, in Heaven above, we have completed this ceremony

to the best of our ability, and now we have buried as you so desire for the resting place of the remains of those who pass from this earth. We have now taken these burdens from our hands. We have now replaced the remains of these beings into the earth from which you created man in the beginning. It has been your desire that the body of man is to be reunited with the soil of earth. We have now fulfilled our duty, we now place the responsibilities in your hands to do with these souls as you think fit. We who are left, have done as best we can to give these remains a decent burial. So now, this is all, the reburial is finished, we have reburied the bones of our ancestors to the best of our ability.

"Now, to you whose remains rest before us, said to be our forefathers. We know not the cause of your passing. We know not whether your death was from sickness or from what other cause. The case is strange that so many people are buried in this area. It seems that not only are there older men and women but children are also included in this ancient burial ground.

"When we were informed that your resting place was located here and that our white brothers had disturbed your rest, we the Lords of the Confederacy were then notified, that this event was accidental and was not done purposely. We then undertook the task to take care and rebury your remains. We, the Indian Nation have put our minds together and decided that the Great Feast of the Dead shall be held. When our white skinned friends were informed of our plans, we all put our heads together and decided to have a Memorial Feast, and we would all unite to have this occasion in your memory. So let your minds thus remain, you whose resting place is before us. There are to be the foods as the Indians so lived upon. Also present shall be the foods of our

white brothers. We have all taken a hand together to please you, our forefathers, who lie before us.

"Listen, once again, our ancestors who lie before us, a meal has been rightfully prepared for your sake. So listen, while we take up and quote the voice of our white brothers. For this purpose, we will use the Great Sacred Indian Tobacco. Today, you have been satisfied with the taste of the sacred tobacco, you our forefathers. The uncovering of your bones was not purposely done by our white brethren. So we ask your forgiveness and beg you not to molest or harm them in the days and nights to come. We, the Indians also join with our white brethren in begging you not to harm our white friends.

"When they uncovered your remains they respectfully made it known. They wish that they may live peacefully as they trod near to your resting places. For their pleadings they use the sacred tobacco to represent them. So let your minds remain thus, you to whom we have directed our voices. Listen once again, we are to speak. Here you lie, our forefathers, that we speak of as likely chiefs of the past. So, ancient chiefs, you are satisfied with the sacred tobacco. You, the dead, can clearly visualize, the feast prepared in your memory. We have united with our white brethren in this preparation today. We hope that you will be glad and satisfied in the future, so we again use the sacred tobacco as a representative of our wishes. So let your minds remain thus.

"Now to you our ancestors whom we will choose to classify as Deacons and Chief Matrons of the Four Main Ceremonies which the Creator released before. This day, we honour you, the Matrons and Deacons, with the sacred tobacco. You can clearly see the food which has been

prepared before you. You can also see that we have united with our white brethren in preparation of their feast. We hope that your minds will be glad and satisfied. We use the sacred tobacco as a token of our wishes.

"We will now direct our voices in a different direction; to the resting place of our ancient people of whom there is no special title. To the men and women of an ancient race. We use also, as token of our wishes, the sacred tobacco to satisfy you. You can clearly visualize that we have prepared this feast in your honour. We have united our pleadings with that of our white friends. We all hope that you will be glad and satisfied in the days ahead. We again use the sacred tobacco as a token of our pleadings and prayers. So let your minds remain thus.

"Another, we now direct our voices to the ancient children right down to the smallest baby. You children have been blessed with this sacred tobacco. There is no darkness to hide the view of the food in preparation of the feast in your honour.

"As you hear the utterance of our voices, we hope you will be glad and satisfied in the days ahead. You can clearly see, we have united with our white friends today in preparing this feast in your honour. We now hope that your minds will thus be satisfied. So let your minds remain thus.

"So to you who lie before us, we wrap together all our minds and prepare a feast, as you can see, in your honour. So let your minds be so, that we have now fulfilled the wishes of our white brethren. We will now all feast together. We shall eat the foods which the Creator has given, ancestors who lie before us. Those of us

who remain of the Indian Race and our white friends are as one to be satisfied. We shall all finish our meal and then our presence, shall be divided once again. Once again we will tread in peace and you shall rest in peace. We now use the sacred tobacco as a token of our wishes. We have spoken as best we can, so let your minds thus remain.

"Another thing, to the people, the chiefs, and all those present, we now direct our voice to you Mr. Harris and assistant, Mr. Nevile and colleagues. We speak for all the people of our nation, we extend to you our greatest thanks. We think that you have done a great honour in fulfilling your desires of reburial. We understand that it has been the wish of all you, colleagues of Mr. Harris. We thank you all as a whole. So let your minds be thus.

"To you Mr. Harris to whom our voices have been directed. We know that this disturbance of ancient burying grounds was against your wishes. There is a Supreme Being who directed your thoughts to the decision you have made. This goes also for all your colleagues, who have also taken a great respect for the living, especially to the lords of the Confederate Council. We cannot express our thankfulness to you, we can only express our thanks to a very small extent, as to the respect you have paid to us. You have indulged in a great task of great expense on our behalf, both of the deceased and the living. We have come to a conclusion that you have placed us in a very high esteem. Lastly, we, the people as a whole, both lords and followers extend our greatest thanks, to you our white friends. So let your minds remain thus."

The form of the speech follows closely that recorded by Fenton and Kurath, (ibid, p. 147-49), including the customary thanksgiving address - ganqonyok, followed by the true message -



ga'nigohā' dog[s'ti' i.e., "what is really on his mind." And the tobacco invocation (below) followed the traditional pattern, including the usual beliefs concerning the dead (ibid, p. 160-63). Slight differences were noticeable in that the leading female figures did not appear to figure so prominently. Fenton & Kurath speak of the women Dead Feast officers and their importance in ultimate sanctions of the ceremony. In the present case it was a Mohawk chief's wife who took the major part in the feast. Also the chief's speech presented a specific reference to the Scarborough officials, welcoming and thanking them as well as beseeching the ancient chiefs to accept the tobacco invocation and feast as a symbol of the sincerity of both Iroquois and white participants, joined together ceremonially to honour the dead. The prayer therefore shows clearly the mixed nature of the ritual which joins the two groups, and is a symbol of a new acceptance of each other, sanctioned by the combined sacred ritual.

At the conclusion of the speech, the Cayuga runner took up the microphone and from a raised position on the fire truck (placed there for the benefit of the press), explained something of the ceremony which had taken place, laying stress upon the great welcome which the white brothers had offered. The young woman who had made the translation then read it in English over the amplifying system. The feast was announced, whereupon the newly arrived Cabinet Minister made his way to the microphone to say he would make a speech. He gave his name to the presiding official, and then proceeded to make a speech of welcome, stressing the important place held by our elder brothers (the Indians) in Canadian society.

The chiefs then moved over to the fire, and the senior chief finished his prayer, this time taking up a handmade wicker basket containing tobacco, and occasionally putting small portions into the fire. Upon the conclusion of the prayer and tobacco invocation (Fenton and Kurath, ibid, p. 148), the food was given out in

paper cups to be eaten with plastic spoons. The "whites" were enjoined to accept food if offered and also that they must not thank the giver until they had finished their portion. It would be an insult to the "Indians" they were told if they should refuse to partake of the feast after coming to watch.

The feast was followed by a banquet, "... honouring Chiefs and other Dignitaries at Scarborough Golf Club (Courtesy of the Township of Scarborough)." Two hundred and forty persons were guests at the banquet, the head table being made up of the following: One Federal and one Provincial Government Cabinet Minister, a former premier and a former speaker of the House, two provincial representatives, one Protestant minister, the Reeve, his deputy and the six councilmen, and one local resident, making a total of sixteen. The Indians numbered three; a Cayuga chief, the assistant secretary of the Confederacy, himself a Mohawk chief, and a Mohawk "princess." The Reeve, as chairman called on the Protestant minister to say a Christian grace, which was followed at the Reeve's request by an Iroquois grace in an Iroquois language. This appears to be the first time in a distinguished formal gathering that a "pagan" grace has been said along with a Christian one. There were several speeches, and several more planned, which due to the length of time allotted for the dinner had to be cancelled.

The speech of the Dominion Cabinet Minister was spontaneously accepted by the Iroquois as grounds for official government discrimination against the Confederacy. They thought he wanted to see the Indians disappear into the Canadian population. The Toronto press reported his speech on this point. "His opening remarks made everyone sit up and take notice. 'Some Indian children are stupid', he began. But as he went on it was clear that he was not endearing himself to the proud people, who feel his Government and its predecessors have consistently broken treaties and gone back on their word. The chiefs wanted to make an immediate reply at

the banquet, but they were informed that there was no time" (Toronto Evening Telegram, Oct. 22, 1956). Another report quoted the "Indians'" reaction to the speech as sponsoring "offensive integration" (Toronto Daily Star, Oct. 22, 1956). As time had run out, the meeting had to be hastily adjourned. The Cayuga runner who featured in many of the arrangements, took over the microphone at the head-table and on behalf of the Iroquois expressed their gratitude to the "whites" for this kind invitation and for their hospitality. Following the banquet, there was a display of Indian dancing on the Golf Club lawns. It was explained that these were not "sacred dances," but merely "social dances" (14).

October 21, 1956. At nine-thirty a.m., the Iroquois gathered in the centre of the burial site. Large numbers crowded outside the roped enclosure. Inside it appeared to be a casual, friendly gathering of people from many different places, only some of whom were known to one another. The atmosphere was friendly however, and many strange Iroquois tried to speak to one another. The usual expression in English was "Hello" or "Hi." An attempt was made to speak an Iroquois language, and those who could do so spoke only in Iroquois. Often words or jokes had to be translated into another dialect. The wife of a Mohawk chief, who had a considerable amount to do with the arrangements, explained that the seemingly casual greeting of acquaintances was really the Confederacy in council. "They are going to give Mr. Harris (Reeve) a hat," and "Mr. Neville (assistant to the Reeve) is going to be adopted by the Iroquois." (15)

The microphone was set up at one end of the hill site, facing a large crowd of visitors. Most of the Iroquois gathered near the microphone, the chiefs being closest to it. A Seneca chief from Tonawanda, U.S.A., took the microphone and spoke fluently and smoothly in the Seneca dialect. A Cayuga chief from Ohsweken, in translating the speech, freely paraphrased it in his own words. "Brothers and sisters, I am asked by the people of the Six Nations to interpret the expression

we have heard spoken by one of our chiefs of the Seneca in an address of thanksgiving. It is the usual custom of one of our brothers and sisters now present to speak on behalf of your people. The first Creator, the Great Spirit who owns the land, gave rules to follow. ... to greet each other, to be thankful to be here, and now to unite our minds. Let this be in our minds. Next. The Creator who created our mothers and fathers, planted many things. We are thankful, we still continue to this day to unite to give thanks, all who are present. Next. He appointed our groups of beings - that bring rain, thunder and our grandmother the moon, and our great brother the sun, who shines the light - our guardian. Four angels the Great Spirit appointed to guide us people from day to day. He has appointed four beings to enforce His creation on earth for our benefit. We thank Thee (?). Let this be in our minds. Next, I refer to (the) Supreme Being the Great Spirit, creator of all, (in) another world above, (has) prepared a place above by His command, (for you to) receive a reward, (your) immortal soul forever."

The Seneca chief looked around, The Reeve called out to the Mohawk chief by the fire, "Josie, what happens now?" "Bill Smith's wanted at the speaker where the mike is," the Seneca chief called out. The latter then spoke in English. He was asked by the chiefs, he said, to say a few words on behalf of the chiefs of the council. "Our white brothers have discussed and put time and effort to see that our ancestors' remains be taken care of. All officers of Scarborough have done this. Indians are grateful and appreciative for what you have done. It is a great thing to leave their remains where they passed away. Leave their remains forever. They're going to turn it into a memorial park. This is wonderful, (and we are) thankful for the hospitality and the gentlemen's respect (for) getting all the Indians from Canada and the United States, (the) six tribes (together). Today (we) bestow a great honour on two (persons). (It is) not done ordinarily. It is our only way to show appreciation. Honourable Reeve Harris

appear by the mike! And another gentleman named Neville. This is going to be a tribal adoption, not a clan adoption." A pause for discussion. "Pardon for the interruption, because the custom has to be unanimously approved. It is the most sacred to the Indian people. It is the highest honour than can be bestowed, a great honour to be a member of the Indian Tribe of Canada and the United States. The first man is the Reeve. He was the one that thought of it in the first place that this burial ground should be taken care of. "(We) bestow on you one of the Iroquois war bonnets." A pause. "(The) Onondaga tribe's white brother." A clan mother placed the bonnet on the Reeve's head. The visitors clapped. "(You are) now a member of the Onondaga of Grand River and the United States - Towξwohξdo - first suggester."

"Mr. Neville is the next gentleman. (I am) asked by the Grand Council to perform this ceremony for them. Next try and remember when some Indian calls you by your Indian name. You are now a member of the Iroquois Confederacy; a great honour. (I) hope in the future you will be coming to the reserve area to see the people of the Indian tribe. And I thank you. There are certain rituals that go with this adoption ceremony. I never done this before in my whole life." There follows an explanation of Neville's Indian name. "There is a fire, he saw the trees, must be an Indian tribe nearby. They lived in tipis with fire always outside. The fire goes up into the sky. He saw that smoke and went to them on the south side. Hayξgwachξnξ - he who saw the fire.

The Onondaga firekeeper then spoke in Iroquois and sang while walking slowly forward, arm in arm with the two novitiates. A slow recitation was interrupted by the general chorus "wo - hu!". The Seneca chief explained that this was not a social function, but one of the sacred songs.

Several persons were then introduced. A county magistrate, himself a Mohawk from Ohsweken, spoke about the welcome accorded by the Indians to the Europeans when they arrived on these shores, and he hoped that the Canadians would be equally cordial in their welcoming of new Canadians from Europe. One Iroquois spoke nostalgically and at length. Another mentioned that one of the responsibilities of newly adopted brothers was to provide a feast of an ox, and he hoped the new brothers would recognize their responsibilities. Another recited a poem in both languages. A clan mother, who was the woman to speak, criticised the speech and attitude of the cabinet minister. She pointed out that, "he thinks he is trying to put over something he does not understand. The cultures are different. They took generations to develop under the Creator. The theme of European culture is compete, compete. Ours is space and plenty provided. The whites were greedy and our inheritance was destroyed. I do not agree with the speaker (cabinet minister.) For example the blacks of the southern U.S.A. would have been happier if left alone."

As the time was running short, other speeches were cancelled, and the presiding chief announced that the Indians who had taken part would walk around the ground as their names were called so that visitors could see who they were. After this some social dancing took place. It was explained that not many people had seen it the night before, and the Indians wanted to let everyone have a chance to see it. The final part of the ceremony was a luncheon provided by the township and motel owners. The makeup of the head-table was as follows: three provincial government representatives, four council members, one metropolitan council member, one local distinguished resident, one university professor and two Iroquois, i.e., the county magistrate and the senior Onondaga chief.

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

In analysing the rituals and their results several points emerge.

First, in the face of expressed resentment on the part of some chiefs at the "corruption" of the sacred rituals by the attendance of non-Iroquois, why were some chiefly members of the Long House religion so willing to perform the ceremony? (Speck, 1949, and Fenton and Kurath, 1951, p. 144, have described the sacred and exclusive nature of this ceremony.) It seems reasonable to suggest that one reason was the opportunity afforded for the Iroquois to gather from places throughout Canada and the United States. A gathering of more than the residential groups of the Six Nations at Ohsweken is rare. The Township officials made all the official invitations and organized transportation and accommodation. The Ohsweken chiefs were pleased at the opportunity to call together all groups for a special occasion. Not only did they want to meet the others, but they wanted the opportunity of conferring as a confederacy council to sanction plans and perhaps more important, to function as a Grand Council. True, a few chiefs do visit other places on occasion and take part in festivals and rituals. But rarely if ever in recent years has there been an opportunity for full participation of the Grand Council at a single ceremony. And this was not just a series of rituals, it was a meeting of the traditional Six Nations Confederacy Council, (nearly thirty chiefs came to the ceremony - sixty per cent of the traditional number of chiefs.) The wish of the Iroquois to function as a people under the authority and religious sanction of their hereditary council seems to have been paramount in overcoming the traditional secrecy (16) of the Feast of the Dead. By allowing the Township authorities to organize the meeting and partially underwrite the costs, the Iroquois could meet again as a full hereditary council.

Second, it is difficult to assess the degree of Confederacy solidarity created by the

failure of the Federal Government to grant political autonomy. There is no doubt however that a major positive sanction to the continuity of the Long House religion and its political ideals is that of the real or believed animosity of the government towards it. The writer had a distinct impression that each action or word by a government spokesman which appeared to discriminate against the Long House people was almost welcomed by them, as it gave them more ammunition for their development of solidarity vis-à-vis the outer world. Several people spoke of the Minister's recent speech (ten days previously) in which "... he looked for the time when the Indians would vanish." As mentioned above, the same speaker's words at the ceremony were interpreted by the Iroquois and some of the newspapers as suggestive of discrimination against them. We are not here concerned with whether there is or is not discrimination, (17) but how comment is received by the Iroquois. It is the explicit and avowed purpose of the Long House people to build a numerically larger religious group with eventual national political autonomy. It seems that the more negative is the policy of the government toward this end, the more useful it has proved to be for the Iroquois in the development of social solidarity. It is seen as a refusal even to recognize or discuss the claims of a minority group for political autonomy within the territory of Canada. (18) Nothing would better serve the purpose of the Confederacy (as visualised by the chiefs of the Ohsweken group) than a public condemnation of their felt discrimination by the government. Publicity for this ceremony was far and above the expectations of the Iroquois. Along with the newspaper, magazine, radio, television and screen publicity, about 2,000 visitors sympathetically watched and listened to all the proceedings. Therefore while some of the Long House people were against inclusion of the whites in the ceremony, it was seen by many as an opportunity for a public demonstration of unity. (19) In addition, the government policy of Indian integration expressed in the context of the sacred Indian ceremony and its sympathetic



reception by others, presented the Iroquois case in its most favourable light. And the unfortunate wording of the Minister's speech, revealing an apparent discriminatory attitude towards the Iroquois, reinforced the unity of the Confederacy as well as gaining a great deal of sympathy from the non-Iroquois audience.

Third, in general the ceremony was a success for both the Iroquois and the township officials. For the latter, a well planned organization which developed from the fortuitous discovery of unknown human bones became the vehicle for publicity for their community. It should be said here that the township officials did everything in their power to insure the authenticity of the ceremony. They also insisted that every care be taken to work with the Iroquois and to respect their feelings and sacred beliefs. Some of the Iroquois resentment was submerged by this acceptance of their ethnic individuality by the whites. It was explained by the Iroquois that their system of government was combined with "... our way of life." Noon (1949, p. 46) points out, "... that government and religion were probably interlocking institutions in pre-contact society." Almost the opposite view is held by Hewitt (1920, p. 543). Whatever may have been the case in the past, opinions expressed at this ritual suggest an interrelation of religion and politics as the desired norm. One chief said, "We chiefs make the law, and without chiefs there is no religion." Thus religion and political authority as visualised in the Grand Council seem to be dependently related. It is almost as if the traditional Iroquois recognize that their continuity rests in the perpetuation of the sacred concept of government by the Grand Council. (20) A senior chief's wife commenting on the success of the ceremony, volunteered the information that doubtless there would be an annual ceremony at Tabor's Hill. (21) When later questioned on this point, she admitted she had no idea what would be done. "It is up to the chiefs to decide. They decide and we follow." If publicity was the major attraction to the township officials, it was also a major consideration to the Iroquois. But the reasons were different.

The Iroquois saw an opportunity to show their social solidarity in the form of the sacred League of the Six Nations, and to ally themselves against the Dominion Government policy of integration.

Of even greater importance was the unique experience of having their way of life, both the sacred rituals and secular customs, enjoyed, appreciated and received by the whites on the same footing as their own. Until this ceremony took place, only the more conservative Iroquois openly proclaimed their traditional ways. Now that they were officially recognized by the cabinet minister's attendance at the ceremony, and publicly welcomed, more of those Iroquois who were trying to live a European style of life could openly appreciate and express their traditional beliefs and ethnic identity in the context of twentieth century convention.

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## NOTES

- (1) Because of their geographical location with relation to a proto-Huron archaeological site they were judged to be contemporary with the latter by Professor J.N. Emerson, University of Toronto, and Mr. Walter Kenyon, Assistant Curator of Ethnology, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. This would make the ossuary site a proto-Huron one, whose members in historic times were traditional enemies of the Six Nations Confederacy.
- (2) For a contemporary account of a seventeenth century consecration ritual, see Jesuit Relations, Thwaites, ed., vol X, p. 279-305. And for an archaeological description of an ossuary, see Kidd, K.E., 1953.
- (3) A few Pre-Iroquois archaeological sites have shown some small rock crevace burials which sometimes have been referred to as ossuaries. However these sites contained the disarticulated bones of only a few individuals, and consequently are different from the Huron type ossuary. See J.B. Nichols, 1928, Notes on Rock Crevace Burials in Jefferson County; Res. and Trans. of N.Y. State Archaeological Assoc. Vol. V, no. 4, Rochester. See also W.A. Ritchie, 1944, the Pre-Iroquois Occupations of New York State; Roch. Museum Memoir, no. 1, p. 168-9, Roch.
- (4) Brebeuf's account of the Huron ossuary burial in the mid seventeenth century has been translated as the Feast of the Dead. And as the Iroquois seasonal camp-move ritual is also known as the Feast of the Dead, there is a confusion between these linguistically different but contiguous tribes.
- (5) One informant at Onondaga Reservation told Dr. C.B. Richards that "It was quite an affair, she (informant) said, with hundreds of people there, many spectators. According to her, the story went that when they were

digging and uncovered the bones that the bulldozers wouldn't go, and men started falling off and fainting." (Personal communication from Dr. C.B. Richards, Oct. 18, 1957.)

Dr. Wm. C. Sturtevant reports the following:

"In May, 1957, a middle aged, politically sophisticated widely travelled, firm Longhouse believer at Newtown, Cattaraugus Reservation, told me of a recent occurrence at Toronto. He said that an attempt was made to level off an 'Indian cemetery,' but that the bulldozer stopped at the edge of the cemetery and could not be driven forward. The driver was able to back up, but every time he reached the cemetery the bulldozer stopped. My informant regarded this as a supernatural effect, and told me that the Canadian whites were much impressed and plan to have a 'feast' held at the cemetery every year."

"In October, 1957, I inquired -- (of the principal Newtown ceremonial expert). A bulldozer was clearing an area on a small knoll -- a road, he thought -- and 'turned up a lot of bones -- a real old graveyard -- Indian bones.' A woman who lived nearby began to hear 'hollering' in the middle of the night. She went to an Indian woman living, he thought, in Ottawa, and asked her advice on exorcising the ghosts. She was told to consult 'the head ones on the reservation.' It was arranged that Indians from Grand River would rebury the bones, and the whites would pay them 'a lot of money' for doing it. Representatives went from many reservations, including Cattaraugus. They arrived the day before the ceremony was scheduled and collected the money." (Personal communication from Dr. William C. Sturtevant, Oct. 30, 1957.)

- (6) In accordance with traditional custom, all matters concerning the Six Nations Confederacy must be dealt within the Onondaga Long House, at which member chiefs of all six nations

must be present. Although most of the tribes have tribal long houses on the Ohsweken Reservation, as the Onondaga chiefs are 'keepers of the fire' and are senior in council, they take the final decision and therefore all matters of an inter-tribal nature are dealt within council at their long house.

- (7) The senior Mohawk chief's wife explained that on the morning of the third day and immediately prior to the chief's ceremony, the council was now considering whether they would adopt both men into the tribe. It had been decided to adopt the Reeve's assistant, but as they were going to "give a hat" to the Reeve as well, they were now deciding if they would officially adopt him as well. A contradiction appears between statements of the latter and those of the Reeve's assistant. It seems likely to the writer that the dual adoption had been approved by the Ohsweken group of the Grand Council, and they wanted now to consult with other chiefs who had recently arrived in order to get general approval for the adoption.
- (8) The tobacco used for the ceremony was grown and cured by the Iroquois which represents a continuation of the traditional indigenous custom of cultivating tobacco for sacred purposes.
- (9) No translation was given, the chief mentioning afterward that it was the usual tobacco burning ritual speech (see Fenton & Kurath, *ibid*, p. 148).
- (10) Fenton & Kurath, *ibid*, p. 145, say the ceremony is performed at village camp moves every ten or twelve years. As this speaker was well aware of the ritual and the occasions for its performance, the confusion about his having been at an ossuary burial ceremony (Huron and Nuetral and not Iroquois) is perhaps deliberate confusion. Huron ossuaries have been found in considerable numbers in Southern Ontario. There are also some in

the North Eastern United States (see Schmitt, 1952, and Nichols, 1929). In general the ossuary complex is not Iroquois but is Huron and Nuetral, although Professor Emerson does state from field surveys the existence of a few historic Seneca (Iroquois) ossuaries in the Niagara Peninsula (Southern Ontario).

- (11) These were the disturbed bones and had been crated and stored at the Royal Ontario Museum. More than fifty percent of them it was estimated remained undisturbed in the ossuaries.
- (12) Supplied by the Provincial Department of Game and Fisheries at the request of the Reeve's office.
- (13) The chief had spent about four or five nights discussing it with several bilingual Iroquois, who attempted to translate and record it literally. Only one person remained to finish the work. The speech in translation was mimeographed and circulated among the non-Iroquois guests. It appears to be a fairly accurate translation. Some liberties had been taken however, such as the choice of the word "enthusiasm" which might better have been rendered as "sympathetic interest."
- (14) As these dances were not an intrinsic part of the ceremony, they have not been described here. For a description of the Feast of the Dead associated dancing, see Fenton and Kurath, (ibid, p. 150-163).
- (15) The Grand Council of the Confederacy met at Ohsweken in September and decided to adopt both of these men. At that time however the Council was represented only by residents of the Six Nations Reservation. It remained now to gain unanimity among the Council chiefs from other places.
- (16) One chief said, "we can only imagine how strongly some object in their own tongue, if

they even tell us about it."

- (17) It is the writer's opinion that the Dominion Government is not discriminating against freedom of religion, economic, social or educational opportunities.
- (18) The Iroquois base their claim on a treaty with the British Government in 1794. They claim that with the birth of the Dominion Government in 1867 their political autonomy was disallowed.
- (19) During the ceremonies the Iroquois expressed their solidarity vis-à-vis the whites by referring to themselves as "Indians" rather than as Iroquois.
- (20) Needless to say this represents a small minority of the Iroquois group. At the Six Nations Reservation at Ohsweken, the resident population is about 4,000. The Agency suggests that about 300 to 350 persons adhere to the Long House religion, while about 800 to 850 voted for the last elective council. The Long House group revise these figures to say that about 1,000 are active Long House people, and as only 800 to 850 voted for the elective council, the remainder of the 4,000 are really Long House by sentiment. There are therefore two parallel councils, an elected council which cooperates with the Indian Superintendent, and the hereditary Confederacy Council in which members are appointed by clan mothers and which has no official legislative or jural authority.
- (21) The Six Nations Iroquois have scheduled a re-enactment of the reburial ceremony on the site for the weekend of Oct. 25-27, 1957.

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