

From: Anderson, Jeffrey
Sent: Friday, September 7, 2018 11:51 AM
To: facultyannouncements
Subject: The Sullivan Campaign: September 7th, 1779

Dear Colleagues,

On September 7th, 1779, American troops commanded by General Sullivan entered and destroyed Kanadesaga, the capital town of the Seneca nation located just southwest of what is now the intersection of Preemption Road and North Street on the northwest side of Geneva. Sullivan's raiders destroyed all the houses, orchards, and fields, as well as the fort known as the "Seneca Castle," thus employing what came to be known as a "scorch and burn policy," replicated in many similar anti-Indian campaigns to follow in American expansion. By the way, some of those fruit trees survived to provide an economic boon for several early Geneva businesses. Bloodshed was averted in the raid, since Seneca inhabitants had fled west well in advance of the slow moving American force. Seneca leaders had organized the retreat from their towns to British held territory because they had assumed their allies would come to their aid and help them return to their homelands. That hope proved in time to be empty. Thus, Geneva is now in America instead of Canada. And, yes, before any scholar reacts with pedantic furor, I know that that is an oversimplification of a complex history.

General George Washington had ordered the Sullivan campaign in retaliation for the alliance that all Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) nations had presumably maintained with the British during the Revolutionary War. Conveniently ignored was the fact that a good number of Haudenosaunee groups fought with the American Revolutionaries, such as contingents of the Oneida and Tuscarora nations, or had remained neutral throughout the war, such as many Seneca towns. Because of this overly generalized pro-British alliance, the United States government justified aggression in claiming all Haudenosaunee lands. To be accurate, Kanadesaga had indeed been a staging point for British-Seneca raids on American settlements, but those actions had been ordered and organized by British authority.

In an oddly contradictory turn of history, thirteen years later the land that was liberated from British-Seneca control upon which the town of Geneva and our institution would grow was acquired by a British land speculation company called the Pulteney Association, despite the fact that at that time it was illegal for aliens to own land in the United States. Because the American economy had been devastated by the war, a series of two American syndicates had been unable to afford making payments for preemption rights to the vast tract extending west of Geneva to the Genesee River. When founding father Robert Morris, directing the second of those syndicates, foresaw impending default on payments for the twelve million acre tract, he engineered a clever arrangement via a legal loophole to sell the land to the Pulteney Association. A British military veteran named Captain Charles Williamson was enlisted to be that loophole. Because he had earlier married an American, Williamson became an American citizen almost immediately after arriving from England, then purchased the land in his name for the association. Morris doubled the return on the investment for his syndicate and thus the national economy experienced an injection of desperately needed capital, the main motive for acquiring Haudenosaunee lands in New York in the spirit of the then prevailing

slogan: “Empire for Liberty!” Through Williamson’s efforts the namesake of the association, Sir William Pulteney of Bath, “owned” principal interest in the land and had many places on it named for him and even his daughter, Henrietta. While of Scottish origin, Pulteney was one of the leading figures at the time in mainstream British society and a major investor in imperial interests in the Americas and India. Adam Smith and David Hume knew him quite well.

Later in our area’s history and culture, a number of communities, including Geneva, commemorated the Sullivan Campaign’s victory annually on this day with parades and speeches. The region, too, somehow became associated with the Scottish heritage of Williamson and Pulteney, a land upon which the latter never set foot. This Scottish heritage is still embraced and celebrated in a number of communities in our region. Thus, the bagpipes at our major events turn my mind to our colonial history every time I march to them.

In the spirit of a culture of respect, I ask that we consider following the path already taken by a good many academic institutions in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia to include an indigenous land recognition statement at all major public gatherings and in other ways work to recognize through recurring, public, and visible expressions the deep history and present participation of the Seneca people in western New York. This may also require a clear, critical rethinking of the cultural forms around us that celebrate an exclusionary colonial history.

Before closing, let me extend my respect and gratitude to those in our community who have worked so hard during and even long before my time here to include Native American history and culture in our curriculum, consciousness, public expressions, and lives of consequence.

As a final word, I ask not for some immediate response to this message, but that you please think about this and bring this topic to the table at every relevant juncture in our community’s ongoing conversations, planning, and celebrations.

Thank you.

Your colleague,

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