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Ashlen M. Clark
James Madison University

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The American Allies:  
The Impact of the Oneida Involvement in the American Revolution

Ashlen Clark  
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Dr. Arndt
Tensions grew rapidly, sides were taken, and the eve of war was upon them. In the midst of a war between brothers, the pressure to decide whether to choose a side or remain neutral was fierce and divisive. In 1775 the Iroquois Six Nations, or Six Nations, once again faced a white man’s war, and again faced the choice of alliance. Their involvement in the American Revolution was one of necessity and attempted preservation, but was inevitably the source of their division and downfall as a major power in New York. The American Revolution was decisive in destroying the ancient covenant chain because of the subsequent differences in tribal alliances and the destruction of the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition.¹

The League of the Iroquois originally started at an unknown date consisting of five Iroquois tribes: the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas. However, after the Tuscarora War in 1722, the Tuscarora Indians migrated from their North Carolina lands to join their Iroquois brethren in New York, becoming the sixth nation of the Iroquois

Six Nations. The vast expanse of “Iroquois Country” stretched from Lake Nipissing in present day Ontario down to the Susquehanna region in Pennsylvania and from the Adirondack Mountains across to the shores of Lake Erie (See Figure 1).

While the villages mostly remained within the confines of their territory, trapping and trading extended far outside of it. After attacking the neighboring Algonquians in the 1600s, the Iroquois pushed them further west in order to move in on their trapping lands. They eventually spread as far as Green Bay, Lake Ontario, and the Ohio Valley bordering the Great Lakes and sometimes even as far south as the Mississippi (Figure 2).

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becoming increasingly militaristic, the Iroquois participated in a cooperative council system that gave each tribe an equal say even if they had unequal representation.\textsuperscript{5} The pressure to take sides in countless European battles and wars, especially the three intercolonial wars, led them towards a more divided society and pushed them into an ongoing back and forth motion of peace, neutrality, and war.\textsuperscript{6}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{The beaver hunting grounds used by the Iroquois after warring with and pushing neighboring tribes further.}
\end{figure}

Contact with Europeans created a reciprocal necessity intertwining the two forever. Relations between the Iroquois and whites fluctuated; however, interactions such as those between American missionary Samuel Kirkland and the Oneida and Tuscarora tribes helped solidify alliances. Samuel Kirkland was a Presbyterian missionary sent to spread Christianity to the Oneidas and Tuscaroras. Both tribes quickly took to the religion and especially Kirkland himself, who majorly influenced relations between the two tribes and

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\textsuperscript{5} Most of these councils were held at a council fire in which chiefs from all six nations convened and made decisions.
\textsuperscript{6} Barbara Graymont. \textit{The Iroquois in the American Revolution} (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1972).
\end{flushright}
Americans later in the war. By 1771, seven different Oneida villages had members following Kirkland, with about three hundred to four hundred people attending his sermons on Communion Days. The bond Kirkland made tied the Oneidas and Tuscaroras to the Americans in a way greater than he could have anticipated and may have been the crucial link to their pro-American stance. In a letter written by Kirkland, he described an account of a letter the Oneidas received from a Jesuit priest concerning their religious views and asking them not to show or discuss the letter with Kirkland. Kirkland explained that not only did the Oneidas disregard the priest on the topic of religion, but they also showed Kirkland the letter. This act alone demonstrated the respect and bond the Oneidas established with Kirkland as well as the solid friendship that would go unbroken.

The British, however, still had standing relationships with the Six Nations through their own connections, including Sir William Johnson. Although Johnson was slightly before the time of the American Revolution, he played a major role in securing the Six Nations’ allegiance, especially the Mohawks, to the King during King George’s War. This relationship was not forgotten and created ties between the British and many of the Iroquois, namely the Mohawks and Senecas. Many of the Iroquois upheld their allegiance to the king out of friendship for those of “Old England and New.” Even the American

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friendly Oneidas stated their love for those of Old and New England, a contributing factor to their initial neutrality.  

It soon became clear that war between the British and the Americans was imminent and once it began, the Iroquois were in the midst of it all. As of 1775, the overwhelming consensus from the Six Nations was that of neutrality and peace. The Oneidas declared neutrality first out of the Six Nations in June of that year, explaining their utmost desire to stay out of the conflict and their attempts at convincing their Iroquois brethren to do the same. The Oneida’s declaration of neutrality impacted the rest of the Six Nations, because in August of 1775, when the American Commissioners of the Albany Committee requested neutrality from the Iroquois, they obliged. The committee’s request for Iroquoian neutrality points to the possibility that the Americans did not believe they could sway the Iroquois into fighting against the British. Many of the tribes, especially the Mohawks and Senecas, had close ties to the British due to participation in previous wars as well as through trade. The British also had a more compelling argument for an alliance since they were an established country with centuries of war victories. The Iroquois looked highly

13 The Albany Committee was formed between 1774 and 1775 in New York to try offenders, establish jails for loyalists, assume police functions, print paper money, conduct Indian negotiations, and to market food and supplies. Edward Countryman, “Consolidating Power in Revolutionary America: The case of New York, 1775-1783.” The Journal of Interdisciplinary History 6, no. 4 (Spring, 1976) 661; “Reply of the Indians, delivered by Abraham, a Mohawk Sachem, speech by the Onondaga Sachem, on August 31, 1775,” American Archives Documents of the American Revolution, 1774-1776 http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/amarch/getdoc.pl?var/lib/philologic/databases/amarch/6668.
upon kinship, so a major influence on their declared neutrality was the Commissioners’ argument that this was a “family quarrel”. The comparison was made to a family, in which the King was the father and the colonies the children. Since some of the “children” remained loyal to the “father,” this war was a dispute between father and brothers and therefore the Iroquois should let them handle it as such. When agreeing to declare neutrality, Little Abraham, the Mohawk Sachem who presented the reply, relayed grievances that the Six Nations wanted addressed in return for their neutrality. These grievances included land settlements and the promise to abstain from fighting on their lands.14 However, once the Americans obtained the result they wanted, they talked their way around all of the Iroquois grievances, foreshadowing the results of an Indian-American alliance.15

At the very beginning of their friendly relations, the Iroquois and the settlers made a covenant of peace they compared first to an iron chain, and then to a silver chain “which they were always to rub and keep bright and clear of spots.” 16 The belief of both the Patriots and Loyalists that they deserved to inherit this covenant proved to be a major problem. A compelling reason for desiring this alliance stemmed from the Iroquois being one of the fiercest military powers in New York and holding a considerable amount of land. This meant that whoever had the support of the Iroquois would control New York, at least

for the beginning of the war. With each holding the belief that they deserved the allegiance of the Iroquois, once it was clear that neutrality was impossible, they began attempting to persuade the Six Nations to take their side.

No longer satisfied by the neutrality of the Indians, in 1776 the British began actively attempting to persuade them that the Americans would only use them, not help them. In March of that year, the British began attending and holding councils to “poison” the minds of the Iroquois, telling them that if the Americans won the war they would not hesitate to immediately turn on the Iroquois. The British described the Americans as deceitful with no real friendship towards the Indians and that they could not be depended upon for anything, especially protection. This first council was effective in beginning to sway many of the Western Iroquois tribes towards England; however, the Oneida still stood strongly by their friendship with the Americans. By April, British Colonel John Butler had achieved the support of the Seneca and parts of other Western tribes and warned of “approaching danger” from the south and east to take him at Niagara – the location of his next intended council fire. This presentation of a possible American attack may have given the Senecas the extra push to join England against the colonies. The Oneidas, however, still remained loyal to the Americans. A moment of realization came for the Americans when in May of 1776 Butler held his council at Niagara that convinced many remaining Western Iroquois to side with Britain. His persuasive speech began with

the illusion of desired peace between the Six Nations and both Britain and America; however, after he pointed out the colonies weaknesses – lack of men, weapons, and clothes, the alliance of other Indians with Britain, and that no man or group could compare to the king – the majority of the Western nations took his side. The two Oneidas present at this council reported to their Chiefs, who in turn relayed to American Philip Schuyler, that over sixty of the Six Nations had set out to Quebec to meet with the British and Sir John Johnson. However, as sides were chosen, tribes did not universally decide on their stance in the war. The year 1777 signified the beginning of true disunity amongst the Iroquois Six Nations during a council fire held at the Onondaga Castle. The Iroquois met to decide what stance they would take as a united front in the war; however, this meeting proved unproductive as none of the tribes could unanimously agree on which alliance they wanted to take. The fire was eventually extinguished and each nation was allowed to choose their stance in the war. This decision to not join the war as a single entity left the Iroquois to react individually with some tribes containing pro-Americans (Whigs or Patriots), pro-British (Tories or Loyalists), and neutrals.

One such nation was the Onondaga nation who remained loosely divided between the three stances – pro-American, pro-British, and neutral – until 1779 when they eventually realized neutrality was no longer viable and were forced to take a side. In the end, half of the Onondagas took up arms with the Americans, and half with the British. The Mohawks were strongly pro-British as they had been from the beginning of the war, with one of their most prominent members, Joseph Brant, leading Mohawks and Loyalists

against the Americans. Although the majority of the Mohawks did side with the British, some still chose to remain neutral such as Little Abraham. Little Abraham was a Mohawk chief who sought for Iroquois neutrality throughout the American Revolution. He practiced “active neutrality” where he aided Americans in diplomatic negotiations and surveillance efforts, but refused to take up arms. Those like Little Abraham who sought only active neutrality participated in the non-combatant parts of the war in hope of preserving their lands and culture did not think fighting was their place.\textsuperscript{21} The Senecas had always upheld a close relationship with England and Loyalists, so after the termination of their neutrality they easily chose to take up arms with the British, along with the Cayugas, leaving the Oneidas and Tuscaroras.

The Oneidas sided strongly with the Americans due to multiple factors, including their close relationship with the American missionary Samuel Kirkland. This close relationship with and respect for Kirkland by the Oneidas helped make them very receptive to the American cause. Some historians have theorized that this was also due to their gradual Europeanization, the strengthening of ties with colonists, and the weakening of ties with the rest of the Six Nations.\textsuperscript{22} According to letters between Indian interpreter and Patriot James Dean and Philip Schuyler, choosing this relationship with the Americans over that of the Six Nations led the Oneidas to being largely distrusted. The Onondagas and Cayugas took every chance they could to reprimand the Oneidas for their friendship with the colonists, including a condolence visit after an Oneida chief’s death. They claimed white men were not to be depended on and as such the Oneidas should rely on their Indian

\textsuperscript{21} Caitlin A. Fitz, “‘Suspected on Both Sides’: Little Abraham, Iroquois Neutrality, and the American Revolution.” \textit{Journal of the Early Republic} 28, no. 3 (Fall 2008) 399-335.
\textsuperscript{22} Levinson, 265.
brethren to the West. They followed this by accusing the Oneida of getting involved in the quarrel between brothers, something the Iroquois had hoped to avoid. The Oneidas response to this accusation was that they were waiting to see if the situation met with opposition from the Confederacy to determine their conduct in the affair, but it was clear where their alliances lay. The Onondagas distrust of the Oneidas lead James Dean to believe it would negatively impact the Americans because if they were no longer trusted amongst the other Iroquois, they were likely to be uninformed, or purposefully misinformed, about the goings on of the English-allied Iroquois.23 The Oneidas were not alone, aside from a few who sided with the British cause, because most of the Tuscaroras were pro-American as well. Even after a great council held by Butler in 1777 where some Tuscarora chiefs claimed they no longer sided with the Americans, the tribe still sent men to aid in the American cause.24 This event exemplifies the disunity within tribes brought about by the American Revolution, as does the split of the Onondaga tribe when the American-supporting members moved to live with the Oneida.

When alliances became prominent and neutrality was left to the few such as the Mohawk Little Abraham, participation in violence with one side against the other escalated. Iroquois on either side of the conflict began increasingly participating in war attacks against each other out of anger for their disagreeing views. Before understanding the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition, massacres of frontier towns such as Cherry Valley should be reviewed. The Cherry Valley massacre in October of 1778 brought forth new levels of brutality not yet seen in the American Revolution. Loyalist Captain William Butler, son of

24 Graymont, 161.
Major John Butler, led the expedition to Cherry Valley with Mohawk Joseph Brant serving under him. His forces included approximately 521 men – 321 one Indians, 150 British Rangers, and 50 men from another Regiment. The problem of human exaggeration and misconception was present in American Captain Benjamin Warren's diary when he accounted for about six hundred fifty men rushing the fort, more men than were even reported to be with Butler. Of the Indians under Butler’s command there were mostly Senecas, a large number of Mohawks, and a handful of Indians from the Cayuga, Onondaga, and Tuscarora tribes. All total, there were a few Indians from each of the tribes in the Six Nations, except the Oneidas who instead were able to give warning to the Patriots in Cherry Valley of the looming attack.

Although an Oneida passed along the information from an Onondaga about Butler and Brant’s expedition targeted at Cherry Valley, the fort and the settlement itself were very unprepared and under supplied, according to American Major Daniel Whiting. Additionally, American Colonel Alden disregarded General Hand’s orders for the residents of Cherry Valley to move themselves and their belongings into the fort, claiming that they would have ample time to move everyone if the enemy were to approach. On the morning of October 11, 1778, the Indian-Loyalist forces attacked the unprepared settlement of Cherry Valley.

The original plan was for a group of the Indians and Rangers to surround the lodging of the principle officers, located outside of the fort, while the majority of the forces

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25 Graymont, 184.
27 Samuel Clyde to George Clinton, January 8, 1779, Draper Manuscript, 5F70, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Division of Archives and Manuscripts, Madison, WI.
28 Samuel Clyde to George Clinton, January 8, 1779, Draper Manuscript 5F70.
were to attack the fort itself. Luckily for a few of the officers, including Major Whiting, the Indians came upon two men cutting wood, one of which was able to escape and give warning. The main attack on the fort occurred on the 11th during the span of about an hour and a half when the Indian-Loyalist forces rushed the fort taking about nineteen prisoner and leaving approximately thirteen dead and two wounded.29 On October 12th, the garrisons were still awaiting reinforcements; however, the focus of the attack had moved to the settlement surrounding the fort where the Iroquois ran rampant plundering and murdering blamelessly. Brant recounted his and Butler’s inability to subdue the Indians as they killed whole families, loyalist or patriot. Brant and a few fellow Iroquois were able to protect some families by either hiding them or putting their mark on them to convince their fellow Indians to let them be.30

On the morning of October 13, 1778, the Indian-Loyalist army withdrew allowing parties from the fort to examine the damage and collect their dead. Captain Benjamin Warren recounted his venture into the settlement as “such a shocking sight my eyes never beheld before of savage and brutal barbarity.”31 Men, women, and children (although mostly women and children)32 lay dead throughout the streets; mangled, scalped, some missing heads and limbs, some burned alive in their houses, and others being eaten by dogs and other scavengers.33 By the end of the massacre, 33 people from Cherry Valley were

29 Alexander, 378.
31 Alexander, 378.
32 Most of the deaths in the village at Cherry Valley were women and children due to the lack of men present in the village itself. The men from the village were called to man the fort, leaving their wives and children at home unprotected.
33 Alexander, 378.
brutally killed while 182 survived without capture.\textsuperscript{34} The number of deaths may lead some to downplay the tragedy; however, the scale to which women, children, and noncombatants were brutally and blamelessly killed astounded and embarrassed even the British, whose side the Indians fought for. This massacre was the final straw for the Americans who became determined to rid the frontier of the destructive enemy Indians.

The Cherry Valley massacre was one of the violent interactions that drastically varied from the typical form of fighting the British and Americans engaged in. Many battles were fought with the two sides opposing each other in open areas where it was clear that the opponent was coming, and noncombatants were rarely ever involved. However, the Cherry Valley massacre was unexpected for the innocents – loyalist and patriot alike – in the village, and many of the deaths were of noncombatant women and children. The shock and astonishment created by the massacre seemed exactly what the involved Iroquois had aimed for after the Americans had wrongfully accused them of such cruelties in Wyoming earlier in the war. Cherry Valley was their way of following through on the accusation, showing the Americans what a true act of cruelty looked like.\textsuperscript{35} The violence of the Cherry Valley massacre exemplifies the war-focused and militaristic mindset the Iroquois society was known for.\textsuperscript{36} This show of cruel and undeserved murders on civilians created a deeper desire in the Americans to rid the frontier of Indians and gave them even further rationale for doing so. If it was not for the brutal massacre at Cherry Valley, the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition may not have happened, or may have at least been less severe.

\textsuperscript{34} November 24, 1778, Draper Manuscripts, 5F30.
\textsuperscript{35} W. Butler to Bolton, November 17, 1778, Haldimand Papers.
\textsuperscript{36} Levinson, 268.
After the Cherry Valley incident, it became clear to the Americans that actions would have to be taken to protect their frontier towns from future attacks by the Indians and Tories. The devastation from these attacks had been felt on many fronts, from death and destruction to disrupting the economy. Fighting meant agriculture was disrupted and in some cases destroyed, which led to less food and contributions to the Continental Army.\textsuperscript{37} George Washington's main goal of sending out the expedition was to push for peace and to "humble" the Indians. However, even if they did not reach peace, the destruction of their villages and crops would push the Iroquois to rely more heavily on the British, in turn weakening and distracting the British. This use of total war\textsuperscript{38} was intended to bring down the Iroquois while hindering the British in whatever way they could. The destruction of agricultural stability represented total war because not only were the Americans fighting the Iroquois in battles, but they were also waging war on as many other fronts as they could, including agricultural. This would add to the damage already inflicted upon their society from destruction of villages and lives because they would be unable to provide for themselves if their food sources were wiped out. This also represented total war through the attacks on noncombatants – women, children and those remaining neutral – because while they may not have been taking up arms against the Americans, they were viewed as being on the same side as the enemy. Their destruction would cause those who were


\textsuperscript{38} Total war is "war which is unrestricted in terms of the resources or personnel employed, the territory or nations involved, or the objectives pursued; esp. war in which civilians are perceived as combatants and therefore as legitimate targets." \textit{Oxford English Dictionary}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed., s.v. "total war," accessed November 10, 2014, \url{http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/413103?redirectedFrom=total+war#eid}. 
actually fighting to feel greater pain and suffering if their uninvolved families were attacked. The goal of this campaign was to be as destructive upon the Iroquois as possible.

Washington charged Major General John Sullivan with leading this expedition after Major General Horatio Gates declined the offer. To ensure the success of the expedition, everything was strategically planned out and organized, making it one of the most carefully planned campaigns of the Revolution. After much debate it was decided that Sullivan would take three brigades up the Susquehanna River, General James Clinton would go south from the Mohawk to meet Sullivan at Tioga, and Daniel Brodhead would head north to the Seneca villages in northern Pennsylvania and New York (Figure 3, page 21). 39

During this time the Six Nations were encountering problems within their confederacy thanks to the Revolution. Between the constant destruction from enemy forces and forces of nature, their agricultural needs had taken a tremendous hit. In some instances being at war had caused them to plant less, meaning everything they planted needed to be harvested. This lack of food meant further military operations could not be carried out as well, if at all, and many tribes were suffering. In addition to food shortages, alliances with either side of the war caused the Six Nations to be very divided. The majority of the Iroquois were still sided with the British, and the Cayugas in particular continued to pressure the Oneidas and Tuscaroras to side with the Six Nations instead of the Americans.

Since they were part of the alliance of the Six Nations for over a century, the Oneida’s decision to side with the Americans, instead of following the rest of their Iroquois brethren in an alliance with England, was a cause of major distress and division within the Confederacy. Not only did the Western Iroquois distrust them, but they also viewed the

Oneidas as not following through on their duties to continue the Six Nations council fire. The Oneida’s decision to take up arms with the Americans instead of following their fellow Iroquois was not simple, nor unanimous, and included many different possible factors. The main factor focused on by many historians was their link to American missionary Samuel Kirkland. It remained hazy as to why the Oneidas took so strongly to Kirkland when they had been a part of an alliance with fellow Indians for over a century, but some, like David Levinson, contributed it to old ties that were only increasing in strength as time went on. With their domination in the trapping and fur trade in the North East, the Iroquois had formed many bonds with European settlers, including the Dutch, French, and English. The interactions through trade allowed for further involvement with European missionaries like Samuel Kirkland, and these interactions were a contributing factor to their intense acceptance of Kirkland. Once Kirkland had been accepted by the Oneidas, he aligned himself with war chiefs, used his economic leverage as interpreter and supplier of food and tools, and called upon his hard earned respect to help push the tribe towards the American cause.

Another factor leading to their American-alliance may have been caused by their progressing “Europeanization” due to the close friendship, involvement, and proximity with the colonists. The more the Oneidas interacted and traded with the colonists, the more they relied on the goods supplied by them, leading to the adaptation of culturally ancient practices, like agriculture. Instead of using the ancient cultural tools for farming, the Oneida had become accustomed to farming tools made by a blacksmith, in addition to

40 Levinson, 266.
41 White, 1-5.
42 Levinson, 284.
43 Levinson, 265.
guns and axes. This meant that they relied more heavily on the goods and services provided by colonists to make the tools they desired and needed.\footnote{Speech of the Oneida Indians to John, the Earl of Dunmore, December 31, 1770, Kirkland Papers. http://contentdm6.hamilton.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/arc-kir/id/195/rec/25.} There was also a drastic conversion to Christianity, an increase in literacy and school attendance, and a transition to carpentry and farming as primary economic activities. These changes increased interaction and reliance between the Oneida and colonists, pulling them closer together. Due to the strengthening of ties with the colonists, the relationship and bonds between the Oneida with the rest of the Six Nations were becoming weaker. Even before the American Revolution the other Iroquois nations disliked the growing relationship between the Oneidas and the colonists. They were viewed as leaving behind their culture and heritage, and therefore leaving behind the rest of their Iroquois brothers. This growing distance created a loss of trust that was only amplified by the Oneida decision to side with the Americans. Therefore, the weakening of the inter-Iroquoian relations with the Oneida could in turn be contributed to the Europeanization of the tribe.\footnote{Levinson, 281-83.}

The biggest source of internal division was within the Onondaga tribe where members took all three sides: Whigs, Tories, and neutrality. When attempting to persuade the Onondagas to take their side, neither the British nor the Americans were successful in winning over the entire tribe, or even a majority. The year 1779 marked the decisive split between the tribe when eight of the Chiefs declared to the Oneida that they were joining forces with them for the Americans. Once they showed their allegiance to America, they had reached a standstill with the rest of the Onondaga tribe who stood firm in their support for the British. As with many of the tribes, those who remained neutral also did not support
the separation of the tribe. Once the pro-American Onondagas lost the support of the rest of the tribe, they decided to leave and live with the Oneidas.\textsuperscript{46}

Luckily for the Onondagas that decided to align with the Oneida and Americans, they escaped the destruction of their village by American Colonel Goose Van Schaick. This destruction gave promise of success for the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition, as it accomplished one of the goals: to make the Iroquois rely on the British. The displaced Onondagas were forced to live with the Senecas; however, they had to rely on the British for food until they were able to plant their own. Even with this attack and information that the Americans were planning further attacks in Iroquois country, British General Haldimand refused to station troops on the borders of their lands. He attempted to console them with claims that if an invasion were to happen anywhere it would be in Detroit.\textsuperscript{47}

Due to various delays from weather, awaiting supplies, and problems with infrastructure, Sullivan and his troops were off to a very slow start and continued on at this slow pace. However, this slow pace worked in Sullivan’s favor not only because the British were fooled into thinking there would not be an attack, but also because by the time they reached Tioga it was too late in the season for the Iroquois to replant any destroyed crops. The slow start and lack of attacks lulled the British into a false sense of security causing them to direct resources elsewhere, which in turn left the entryway to Iroquois country unprotected and susceptible to attack. As Sullivan, Clinton, and Brodhead’s armies progressed, especially once they were united, the British quickly realized their numbers were far fewer than the Americans’. With the lack of resources to give to the Iroquois and


\textsuperscript{47} Bolton to Haldimand, May 8, 1779, Haldimand Papers.
their incessant need for them, the British came to realize that instead of the Iroquois being of assistance to them when they needed aid, the Iroquois were constantly the ones in need of assistance.

After many skirmishes and the destruction of towns along the way, the united army encountered the Iroquois at Newtown, the place the Indians had chosen to stand up to the Americans to attempt to prevent them from pushing further into Iroquois country. Their attempts to hold the Americans back were fruitless, as the Americans far outnumbered the Iroquois-Loyalist forces. The appearance of having them surrounded caused many Iroquois to flee, leaving the rest to fend for themselves. Once they realized there was no hope for victory, the British-Iroquois troops turned to retreat, carrying their wounded to canoes for escape. Although the Americans were not able to catch up with the retreating forces, they returned to the town to burn it down, destroy everything edible in the fields, and to scalp the dead Indian warriors. After the town was decimated, the army continued on their path of destruction. 48

As they marched through Iroquois Country, the Americans faced little defense as they devastated town after town, for most of the Indians fled before the armies even arrived. They burned Catherine’s Town, Appletown, Kanadesaga, Little Beard’s Town, Cayuga settlements, Mohawk settlements, Delaware and Seneca towns, villages all along the Allegheny, and many, many more (Figure 3). 50 The British made many attempts to put

an end to the campaign, like the ambush at Kanagsaws, but for the most part failed to stop
their progress. Eventually the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition made it’s way through all of the
enemy Iroquois country, leaving behind a massive wake of destruction.

By the end of the expedition, the Iroquois were not subdued but infuriated. The
destruction of their homes, friends, kin, and fellow Iroquois did not bring them to desire
peace, but vengeance as they now had a cause in the war. Major Jeremiah Fogg said
concerning the results of the campaign that, “The nests are destroyed, but the birds are still
on the wing.” This comparison embodied what many Americans soon saw to be true, as
the Iroquois’ displacement and anger only fueled their desire to take up the hatchet with
the British and fight against the Americans. However, one area they were successful was
making the Iroquois more dependent on the British. With their homes and crops destroyed,
the Indians had nowhere to live and nothing to eat and therefore called upon their alliance
and relied on the British for assistance.

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51 “Blacksnake Conversations,” Draper Manuscripts, 4S37-38.
52 Jeremiah Fogg, Journal of Major Jeremiah Fogg: During the Expedition of General Sullivan
Since the Mohawks, Senecas, Cayugas, and part of the Onondagas now had a dog in this fight, the split between them and the Tuscaroras and Oneidas became deeper and stronger. The Oneidas and Tuscaroras had chosen to take the side of their enemy, the ones who destroyed their homes and killed large numbers of their people. The fact that these two tribes could side with the Americans even when they were destroying their Iroquois brethren was inexcusable to the rest of the Confederacy. In addition to the Mohawks, the Oneidas were viewed as one of the protectors of the Eastern entrance to the Iroquois Confederacy, and were entrusted to give warning of invasion. Therefore, this betrayal of leading the Americans into Iroquois lands for destructive purposes created an even wider divide between the Oneidas and the rest of the Confederacy. The destruction of their village also led some of the previously pro-American Onondagas to forget their alliance and side with the British. In fact, by retaliating with the same kind of brutality seen by the Loyalist-Iroquois forces at Cherry Valley, the Americans incited a campaign of equal destruction upon themselves yet again, rendering the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition a failure.

In 1780, the British and Indians launched a campaign of their own seeking revenge for the destruction by the Americans. They went throughout the frontier lands destroying white and American-allied Indian villages as they went, proving that all the Sullivan-Clinton expedition accomplished was to infuriate the Iroquois. In February, a group of four Indians, consisting of the Oneidas Skenandon and Good Peter, and the neutral Mohawks Little Abraham and Unaquandahoojie, went to see Guy Johnson – a British Officer and nephew of Sir William Johnson – and the Mohawk Aaron Hill about peace. They claimed to regret the situation the Six Nations were in because of Sullivan’s campaign and wished for peace,

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53 Graymont, 226.
neutrality, and the return of the Six Nations to their old lands. However, Johnson and Hill would hear nothing of this and expressed their upmost disgust and distaste for those who had sided with the Americans and participated in such a treacherous manner against the rest of the Six Nations. Once this offer of peace had been denied, Brant continued on his brutal campaign, raiding and pillaging frontier towns.  

The threats faced by the Oneidas and Tuscaroras during this campaign to repent and return with them to Niagara to join the rest of the Six Nations were severe and they eventually gave their word they would return with them. After this, 294 previously American aligned Iroquois, mostly the remaining Onondagas, Kanaghsorages, and 2 Oneida families, joined their brethren in New York, while the settlements of the Oneidas and Tuscaroras that stayed behind were destroyed. Once the 1780 campaign was over, what was left of the Oneidas and Tuscaroras faced only hardships thanks to their allegiance to America. They had been displaced and forced to live in subpar shacks with little to no protection from the looming winter, and a lack of food that had plagued the Iroquois since the beginning of the war. By the end of the winter, many of these Iroquois had died from exposure or starvation.

Eventually peace was reached between the Americans and the British through the Paris Peace Treaty; however, both sides forgot the involvement of the Iroquois and included their lands in the land granted to America. This oversight enraged the Iroquois

54 “Copy of Proceedings with four Rebel Indians” Haldimand Papers, pg 104-108.
who officially no longer had land of their own. To solve this, Brant arranged with British Canada for a settlement to any friendly Indians who wished to relocate to Quebec and in 1785, two years after the end of the Revolution, he asked the Oneida to attend a peace treaty conference for the Six Nations. Eventually the Six Nations came to peace, but continued to live divided with some being in America while others remained in Canada. This division in distance never allowed for the Six Nations to be fully reunited after their split and they eventually became so divided that they created two Six Nations: one in America and one in Canada.

The Oneidas and Tuscaroras that were sided with and decided to remain in America after the war realized that their alliance with the victorious side had not ensured their well-being. After finally returning to his missionary duties with the Oneida in 1785, Samuel Kirkland wrote a letter to his wife, Jerusha, describing the horrid conditions under which the Oneidas lived. Instead of living in large villages with sound homes, the Oneidas were now settled in a greater number of small villages scattered throughout their territory and living in primal huts. Meat was a scarcity they rarely had the luxury of, as they relied mostly on corn, squash, and potatoes. Kirkland recounted how had it not been for the neighboring Stockbridge Indians, he would have starved to death and described the Oneidas as “in plain English – filthy, dirty, nasty creatures – a few families excepted.” This blunt and degrading description of the Oneidas by Kirkland who was always fond, supportive, and protective of them exemplified the severe decrease in quality of life faced by the Oneidas after the American Revolution. The only positive remark Kirkland made in his letter was that even

through the terrible conditions, some still followed religious instruction, which showed the devotion still felt towards Kirkland and what he had bestowed upon them.\(^{58}\)

The recurring problem and debate faced by the Oneidas, and all Native American tribes, was the heated debate of land and restitution. The Oneidas assumed that their relationship with the Americans would lead to their protection and compensation after the war; however, compared to what they started with, they were left with almost no land to call their own. A source of outrage for the Oneidas was the Treaty of Philadelphia in 1792 in which the Cherokee Nation was given a yearly payment of five thousand dollars in addition to goods they needed as payment for lands taken by the United States.\(^{59}\) The Oneidas felt cheated and overlooked by this treaty, especially after later in 1792 when their appeal to Congress for five hundred dollars was put aside for “further consideration”.\(^{60}\) From the period right after the American Revolution, through the peace settlements between the Six Nations, to throughout the later United States history, the Oneidas paid for their alliance with the Americans through gradual loss of land, ending in an incomparable reduction of land once held by the tribe (Figure 4\(^{61}\)).


While they began as a united front, by the end of the Revolution the Iroquois Six Nations were divided not only by their choices in alliance, but by distance as well. Their relationships with both the British and the Americans greatly affected their relationships with other tribes within the Six Nations, which was only solidified by the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition. The expedition served to worsen pre-existing divides between the Oneidas and the rest of the Six Nations, and gave the pro-British Iroquois a cause in the American Revolution. Even after their differences were put aside, the divide between the Six Nations never fully healed and they never regained the power they once had.
Primary Sources


- The diary of Captain Benjamin Warren from 1778 recounting the Cherry Valley Massacre. Gives account from an American soldier’s point of view leading up to, during, and after the Iroquois-Loyalist attack on Cherry Valley.

“Answer of the Commissioners to the Speech delivered yesterday by the Indians” *American Archives Documents of the American Revolution, 1774-1776*

- The response given to the Iroquois by the Commissioners of the Albany Committee after hearing Little Abraham’s response of Iroquois neutrality and grievances. They responded appreciatively to their declared neutrality, but did not give concrete answers to the Iroquois grievances.


- Journals of Officers from the Continental Army who fought during the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition. Primary sources describing conditions, maneuvers, and experiences encountered by those who took part in the Expedition.
Draper Manuscripts. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Division of Archives and Manuscripts, Madison, WI.

- Contains letters, legal documents, and other papers collected by Lyman Draper concerning the "Trans-Allegheny West". The date range goes from roughly 1740 to 1815 and contains documents authored by many different people, such as Joseph Brant and Blacksnake to name a few.


- Continental Army Major Jeremiah Fogg's journal kept during his participation in the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition.

Haldimand Papers. Library and Archives Canada.

http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_mikan_105513

- Letters and papers kept by Frederick Haldimand beginning around the Seven Years War until the end of the American Revolution. Includes documents concerning military, civil, and Indian affairs during the time period.


- Letters sent to and from Sir William Johnson from about 1738 to 1774. Also includes letters from other sources concerning Sir William Johnson or topics he was involved in.

"Reply of the Indians, delivered by Abraham, a Mohawk Sachem, speech by the Onondaga Sachem, on August 31, 1775," *American Archives Documents of the American
The 1775 response from the Iroquois Six Nations given to the New York Albany Committee concerning Iroquois neutrality in the American Revolution. The speech contains the Iroquois’ explanation for agreeing to neutrality in addition to a list of grievances towards the Americans.


A large collection of papers and letters written to, from, and concerning Presbyterian Minister Samuel Kirkland. Discusses a wide variety of topics, but has a plethora of information concerning the American Revolution and the Iroquois tribes, specifically the Oneida.


Letters and Papers to and from Major General John Sullivan and others concerning the American Revolution.

**Secondary Sources**


A map marking the Iroquois beaver hunting territory according to the 1701 Nanfan Treaty.

- Looks at the American Revolution in terms of the Native Americans effected by it. The book focuses on the experiences of Native Americans, not just their participation in the war.


- Discussing the institution and consolidation of governing bodies in New York during the Revolutionary era. Explains the creation and introduction of committees like the Albany Committee to handle things such as trying offenders, establishing jails for loyalists, assuming police functions, printing paper money, conducting Indian negotiations, and marketing food and supplies.


- Looks into the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition and the overall failure of the Expedition. He also analyzes how the failure of the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition often overshadows the importance of the expedition in understanding the Continental Army at a turning point in the war.

- Discusses the problem of Iroquois neutrality, or lack thereof, during the American Revolution. A specific focus is given to the Mohawk Little Abraham and his desire and attempts for neutrality.


- Documents and analyzes the various ways the Iroquois Six Nations were involved in the American Revolution. Includes descriptions and background on the Iroquois culture, the alliances during the war, and the consequences faced by the Iroquois after the revolution.


- A map depicting the land distribution between the different nations of the Iroquois Six Nations in western New York and northern Pennsylvania.


- Analyzes the different factors that led to the alliance between the Iroquois Oneida Nation and the Colonists during the American Revolution.

“Oneida Land holdings in New York after Federal Treaties” (map), Sovereign Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, accessed on November 10, 2014,


- A map depicting the changes in Oneida land holdings in New York in 1785, 1788, 1794, and 1920.

- A map showing the route taken by the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition including the towns they went through and the two routes taken by Sullivan and Clinton before they converged at Tioga.


- The articles and details of the Treaty of Philadelphia between the Cherokee Nation and Congress detailing the compensation given to the Cherokee after their involvement in the American Revolution.


- Details the interactions between the Indian Nations and Europeans in the Great Lakes Region. White focuses on the Natives’ sides in the interactions and the way it shaped the Great Lakes Region of the United States.