

The 1916 Installation of Chiefs

On the 21st of September, 1916, according to the rules of the Six Nation Confederacy, 9 men of the community were named to be installed as Chiefs, and 11 men of the community were named as sub-chiefs. On the document naming the men, there are the names of 2 women who must have been instrumental in the installation. In documentation it was called an “Installation of Life Chiefs”.

This was not the first time the community tried to counter the institution of the elected council, and it would not be the last time; but, this September it will be 100 years since the Installation of these men.

Background

In the early days of the community, after arriving at the Bay of Quinte, there was a community council with Chiefs named by the three clans. We know that the women had a prominent role in the naming of these chiefs. We know there were war chiefs. There was also a “Head of the Village” (Captain John Deserontyon) which was a role appointed from the outside by officials of the Government of Upper Canada. The names of these community council Chiefs are not well known.

After the death of Captain John, six community chiefs were named. Two of the men were acknowledged to be chiefs by Upper Canada with the giving of medals. There was a medal for the named Wolf Clan Chief, John Green, and a medal for the named Bear Clan Chief, Joseph Smart.

These six chiefs were appointed and replaced internally within the community according to the rules of the community.

In a letter from 1835, it was reported to the Government of Upper Canada that women had an active role in decision making, and in 1837, at the time of the Upper Canada Rebellion, 3 men were appointed Chiefs by MBQ and confirmed by the Chiefs of the Six Nations.

In the 1840's there was growing dissatisfaction with the management by the men called the “Old Chiefs”. In 1848, the community decided to modify how administration was handled. They kept the old chiefs, appointed and replaced

in the old way, but they also appointed a council made up of two chiefs, two councilmen and a secretary.

In the 1850's and 1860's there was a blended system of "Old Chiefs and 5 councilmen. The councilmen, who at first had been appointed, came to be elected.

But in this time frame the "Old Chiefs" began to die and it became harder and harder for the community to replace them. The community tried to appoint Seth Powless as a Chief in the old way but there was a strong resistance from the officials of the Indian Department.

In 1868, visiting Superintendent W. R. Bartlett reported that the community affairs were managed by 5 councillors, 3 elected by a majority "of the tribe" and 2 chosen "by me".

Federal Legislation

The legislation that brought federally mandated Council elections to the community was called:

An Act for the gradual enfranchisement of Indians, the better management of Indian Affairs, and to extend the provisions of the Act 31st Victoria, Chapter 42 S.C. 1869 c. 6 (32-33 Vict.) Assented to 22nd June 1869.

It said the following about these new elections:

Section 10. The Governor may order that the Chiefs of any tribe, band or body of Indians shall be elected by the male members of each Indian Settlement of the full age of twenty-one years at such time and place, and in such manner, as the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs may direct, and they shall in such case be elected for a period of three years, unless deposed by the Governor for dishonesty, intemperance, or immorality, and shall be in the proportion of one Chief and two second Chiefs for every two hundred people; but any such band composed of thirty people may have one Chief; Provided always that all life Chiefs now living shall continue as such until death or resignation, or until their removal by the Governor for dishonesty, intemperance or immorality.

With this legislation, the women of the community were explicitly denied their traditional role in decision making and denied any role in the new, imposed system.

The first election of a council under this system happened in October, 1870. The council minutes show that the "Life Chiefs" still played a role in the

community. Chief Seth Powless, Chief Joseph Penn and Chief Thomas Green were the last three named Life Chiefs. Although the Government of Canada did not recognize Seth Powless as a Life Chief, he continued to conduct business in that role.

As they passed away, as the federal legislation stated, there was no allowance for any replacements of these Life Chiefs.

Chief Seth Powless died in 1877. Chief Joseph Penn died before 1881. Chief Thomas Green died in 1881.

1889 Petition

Although some in the community were content with the federally imposed system, many others were not. In 1889, a petition with over 235 names, including over 115 names of women, was submitted to the Governor General of Canada.

The Petition was requesting a return to the old ways of decision-making. It was submitted by Joel Johnson, the head chief of the elected council at that time, and yet he was a strong supporter of a return to traditional decision-making.

At this time, MBQ informed the Government of Canada that 6 men had been named to Chiefs titles and “installed” by “Brethren from the Grand River”. Some positions were not immediately filled.

The Federal Government of Canada did not approve of a return to the old ways. They did not approve of women having a role in decision-making. The attempt was rejected, however the desire to return to the old ways did not die.

Similar to Joel Johnson, Joseph I. Brant who had been named to a title in 1889, was actually elected to Council in the fall of 1891. He served one term.

1916

It was a year of turmoil. WW1 continued to take men away from the community. Chief Thunderwater, from the Council of Tribes, had visited the community in 1915. He called for an end to the role of the Indian Agent, and called for women to be involved in the decision-making process once again. Nationally, there was a campaign for voting rights for women. There was a thirst for change in many places, and in the community a strong desire to be rid of the ever tightening grip of the Federal Government.

In September 1916, a document was prepared with a listing of the clan Chiefs for the community. A transcription of that list follows.

<i>T. J.J. Brant</i>	<i>AHYONHAWATHA</i>	<i>Sub. John W. Maracle</i>
<i>T. Well Green</i>	<i>DEHARIHOKEN</i>	<i>Sub. R. J. Barnhart (F. Sero)</i>
<i>T. Wm. Doreen</i>	<i>SADEKARIWADEH</i>	<i>Sub. Herby S. Brant (B)</i>
<i>W. Wm. J. Sero</i>	<i>SARENHHOWANEH</i>	<i>Sub. Andrew Sero</i>
<i>W. Ab. Maracle</i>	<i>DEYONHEHKON</i>	<i>Sub. Peter Doreen</i>
<i>W. Jake Maracle</i>	<i>ONRENHREHKOWAH</i>	<i>Sub. Joe Sero (A.C. B.)</i>
<i>B. S. Brant</i>	<i>DEHENASKHEREHEH</i>	<i>Sub. John J. Smart</i>
<i>B. G. Hill</i>	<i>AHSTAHWEHSEHRONRONTA</i>	<i>Sub. Johnson Lewis (J. Sero)</i>
<i>B. P. Buck</i>	<i>SOHSKOHAROHWANEH</i>	<i>Sub. John A. Maracle</i>

(as written in the original document)

The names of 2 women were also on the document, “Mrs. K. Hill, Bear” and “Mrs. Jayn D.”.

Mrs. Catherine Hill was the mother of George Hill, named in a Bear title. She was born Catherine Brant, the daughter of Catherine John and Michael Brant. Mrs. Jane Doreen was the mother of William Doreen, named in a Turtle title. She was born Jane Maracle, the daughter of Susannah Brant and William Maracle.

We have traced the female relations of the named men as best we can, and we have researched the women named in this document.

We will do our best to honour these community members who wanted a return to community controlled decision making, when the Government of Canada wanted more and more control over the lives of MBQ members.

Next month, there will be a commemoration of the “Installation of 1916” with much information to share. Please join us in commemorating this historical event.