

THE OJIBWA-IROQUOIS WAR: THE WAR THE FIVE NATIONS DID NOT WIN

by

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ABSTRACT

Most colonial observers, as well as most past and present historians, consider the Iroquois of the Five Nations of upstate New York as the central military and diplomatic Indian force of the Eastern Woodlands during the 17th and 18th centuries. On the other hand, the traditions of the Ojibwas/Chippewas, Ottawas and Hurons talk of an extended and fiercely contested struggle that by 1700 had soundly crushed the Five Nations Iroquois.

The internal consistency of Indian oral traditions as they have been preserved by 19th century Indian writers strongly support these ancient traditions of a cataclysmic defeat suffered by the Iroquois. Supporting data can also be found in the usual colonial historical records.

Introduction

“Many historians have noticed the wars of the Six Nations, and their conquests” complained the 19th century Ojibwa Indian writer Peter Jones (Jones 1861:130). One of his goals was to tell the story of the war the Iroquois did not win, the nation they failed to conquer. George Copway, another 19th century Ojibwa writer, proudly wrote that: “as far as I am able to learn, our nation has never been conquered” (Copway 1850:44). His book, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* (1850) centers on the “disastrous war” between the Iroquois and the Ojibwas. If historians are correct in holding that when an oral civilization moves to become literate, the first items recorded are the texts felt to be the most important, then the importance of the question to this very widespread and populous Indian people is obvious. Since the Ojibwas themselves considered this war to be so important, then the historian in this case does not have to concern himself over the recent methodological question of what exactly should be “Indian” history.

This war does not pit a skulking warrior looking for a scalp or two against the ever-vigilant Indian family. The war does not consist of small, indecisive skirmishes fought by the traditional small Indian war party. Rather, Jones and Copway paint a great campaign mobilizing thousands of warriors on both sides, a great campaign in which Algonquian-speaking Indians combine in great numbers to crush their common enemy, a great campaign in which armies start at different sites, move along the Great Lakes waterway, clear the enemy from these bodies of water, and chase the foe down several rivers connecting numerous lakes.

The loser, the Five Nations, never fully recovers. The winners divide up the area north and west of the Iroquois New York homeland. For numbers participating, for strategy employed, for importance of the consequences following from the war, there's absolutely no other Indian military campaign like it.

What follows will be divided into three parts. Part one will describe the war as reported by Algonquian, particularly Ojibwa, informants. Part two examines how historians have judged the credibility of these reports. Part three tries to show why the reports are in general credible.

The "Ojibwa Thesis"

A number of Indians who belong to the general Ojibwa/Chippewa/Ottawa (Anishinabe) tribal stock have written about the war of their nation and its allies against the Iroquois of the Five Nations. The fullest description is found in George Copway's *Traditional History*. Copway's "preface" self-consciously states that his work was "the first volume of Indian history written by an Indian, with a hope that it may in some degree benefit his nation . . ." Peter Jones outlines more briefly the actual struggle, but spends some time on the historic Indian proofs that the titanic struggle actually took place. Robert Paudash, Ojibwa Chief, fills in traditional family details of the struggles that marked the end of the war. Francis Assikinack of the Ottawa tribe also fills in details, in his case one of the beginning battles of the war. Schoolcraft (married to an Ojibwa) in his *The Indian In His Wigwam* (1848) and also in his *Algic Researches* (1839) gives brief accounts of the Huron (Wyandot) traditions of the same event. Peter Clarke's *Origin and Traditional History of the Wyandotts* (1870) emphasizes the western segment of the struggle.

William Warren, a young Ojibwa, rather slights the entire story in order to concentrate on the centuries-long Sioux-Ojibwa war with which his informants and relatives are vastly more familiar, but his paragraph summary is worth quoting (Warren 1885:146):

Their anxiety to open the road to the white traders, in order to procure fire-arms and their much coveted commodities, induced the Ojibways, Ottaways, Pottawa-

tumies, Osaukies, and Wyandots to enter into a firm alliance. They sent their united forces against the Iroquois, and fighting severe and bloody battles, they eventually forced them to retire from Canada.

Warren also lays down elsewhere the important principle that “the confederation of the six nations, whom [the Ojibwas] denominated *nod-o-way-se-wug*, from *nod-o-way*, ‘The Addler’, appears to have been their most inveterate foes . . .” (Warren 1975:139). This enunciation of the cardinal historic enemy is particularly significant since the history of the Ojibwas that Warren repeats in his book is rather the history of the Sioux-Ojibwa war.

These traditional accounts all tell the same story: the Ojibwa and their allies around the turn of the 17th century utterly crushed the Iroquois of the Five Nations.

Because Copway, Jones, Warren, Paudash and Schoolcraft are either Ojibwas or related to Ojibwas, then it can be called the “Ojibwa” war. But “Ojibwa” must be taken to be a short-hand word for all the linguistically related groups that fought the Iroquois of the Five Nations. Some historians emphasize the unity of these groups by lumping under the title of the “Council of the Three Fires” the tribes individually (and somewhat artificially) identified by Europeans as Ojibwa, Potawatomi and Ottawa. Moreover it must not be forgotten that Ontario Ojibwas became known as “Mississaugas” while Western Sault Ste. Marie Ojibwas are also called “Salteaux” (see Smith 1975a:211-222).

According to some Indian traditions a relatively peaceful Algonquian-Five Nations interchange had been going on for many years prior to the middle of the 17th century. In any case, not until the destruction by the Five Nations of the Hurons did overt Ojibwa-Five Nations enmity begin. Mosang Paudash (1914:n.p.) places the blame for the war on Iroquois barbarities to which Ojibwas were told, submit or “if not, war to the knife was to be ever between the Mohawks and the Ojibwas.” The Five Nations disagree and point to the presence of émigré Hurons among the Ojibwas as being the leading factor for breaking a treaty that had lasted according to their traditions for two hundred years. Both groups were interested in the same thing — the fur trade. The Five Nations were unable to mount immediately a really effective military force against the Ojibwa if for no other reason than the presence of so many enemies closer at home. Increasingly though through the last decades of the 17th century the tensions increased between the Ojibwas and the Five Nations. Treaties made, treaties broken. Increasingly the remnants of the Hurons who had fled to the protection of the Ojibwas insisted on the necessity and desirability of decisively defeating the Five Nations. Iroquois had broken treaties, Iroquois blocked trade with the English and French, Iroquois were moving into the Huron peninsula — three reasons, says Copway (Copway 1972:83, 87, 93), for war against “the Turks of the American forest.” More simply put by Robert

and Johnson Paudash (Paudash 1905:8), the Ojibwas decided that it was “a matter of life and death.”

Jones, Copway and Paudash insist that the Iroquois were the aggressors. Copway lists in some detail three provocative “offences” committed against the Ojibwas (Copway 1972:78-82). The first offence was in 1652 when the Iroquois “barbarously plundered and massacred the Ojibway warriors.” This was followed by a Council of Peace at a place below Sault Ste. Marie between the Iroquois and the Ojibwas. The second offence is supposed to have occurred near where Bytown (Ottawa) stands on the Ottawa River where 22 of 25 Ojibwas of a hunting party were killed. The “highly exasperated” Ojibwas went to the Iroquois and demanded restitution for the killings. After an emotional debate between the aggressive young Iroquois and the more pacific elders, a second peace treaty was signed. The treaty lasted only three years for then “bands of the Iroquois waylaid the Ojibways simultaneously at various points” on the Ottawa River. The first great battle of the campaign against the Iroquois will center the next year around an ambush of a Mohawk war party in the lower Georgian Bay area.

When news of this organized Iroquois campaign reached the Ojibwas they decided at a general council on a major campaign of reprisal starting early in the next spring. Copway, Jones and Paudash all insist that it was a decision arrived at in a general gathering of the Indians of the Sault Ste. Marie area. During the winter months the wampum belt was sent to all their Algonquian-speaking allies. The émigré Hurons “excited the revengeful feeling of the Ojibwas by telling them of the outrages the Iroquois had committed on their children” (Copway 1972:83). Both Copway and Jones vividly describe the frenzy of excitement in the Algonquian camps.

The Algonquian-speaking warriors met below Sault Ste. Marie in early May. The Ojibwas had evolved in the 17th century the custom of huge multiclan settlements in early summer, and this tradition of a gathering of groups of a thousand or more facilitated the planning of the movements of a large number of warriors. The presence of so many Hurons no doubt accentuated the movement toward large numbers of braves taking a role in the formation of a war party. The Hurons had regularly fielded 500-600 warriors in the annual spring and summer raids, war parties which got even larger in the years just before their 1648 defeat. Moreover, Ojibwas in the 17th century did not portray those individualistic and atomistic traits that 20th century anthropologists think now characterize contemporary Ojibwas. In both centuries Ojibwas were a hardy people and Copway held (1972:10) that there is as much difference between the Ojibwas and many tribes of the south as there is between “the strong wind and gentle zephyr.”

Several accounts insist that the military force was composed of warriors from many tribes. Robert Paudash alone ignores by name other tribal groups as

he only lists warriors of his eastern branch of the Ojibwas (the Mississaugas) in his description of the fighting, but Paudash also mentions (Paudash 1905:8) “reinforcements” arriving to help the Mississaugas. Jones’ account also centers exclusively on the Ojibwas, yet his description of how the victors divided up the conquered area shows he is using “Ojibwa” as the translation of “Anishinabe,” the designation that would include groups like the Ottawas and the Potawatomis. Assikinach, who gives the Ottawa account, speaks of the “Ottawas and their allies.” Copway and Warren emphasize the many tribal groups that share in the campaign. Large numbers of tribes (e.g., Sacs, Foxes, Shawnees, etc.) are listed as arising against the “Nadoways,” the traditional enemy of all Algonquian-speaking Indians. Copway and Warren also mention the Hurons as important participants. The Huron (Wyandot) historian Peter Clarke (Clarke 1870:11-14) lists the great battle against the Senecas on Lake Erie as being the result of a combined Wyandot and Ojibwa military operation.

While the various accounts generally emphasize just one aspect of the campaign, the total picture adds up to a description of a complicated strategy in which the attackers subdivide to assault different areas and then reunite to continue the war. Assikinach portrays a great battle fought at the Blue Mountains of northern Ontario near the town of Penetanguishene. In this portrayal, Ojibwa forces have come from Lake Superior to join Ottawa forces from Manitoulin Island as both move on to the Blue Mountain staging area (Schmalz 1977:231). Ojibwa spies hundreds of miles away at Rice Lake spot the oncoming Iroquois war party, and rush back to alert the camped Ojibwa-Ottawa forces. At that point messengers rush to the west and southwest to call in the Ojibwas at the Saugeen River on the Ontario side of Lake Huron and the Ojibwas from the Owen Sound of the Georgian Bay area. These forces easily outnumber the invading Iroquois who are almost annihilated except for a few who are left to go back to tell their relatives of the defeat (see Fig. 1).

The simplest description is Peter Clarke’s. He straightforwardly tells that a Wyandot and Ojibwa party completely defeated a large Seneca party on Lake Erie. Clarke’s laconic approach to his tribe’s momentous victory can be supplemented by the Wyandot tradition (cf. Mansfield 1899:62-63) that found its way into the *Buffalo Gazette* of March 17, 1818:

The nations among whom the Wyandots now found themselves — Pottawatomies, Ottawas and Chippewas — received them [Hurons/Wyandots] with friendship and gave or lent them land to settle on. At the solicitation of the strangers they even went so far as to fit out a fleet of large and elegant birch canoes, with a view to meeting the Senecas, whom they expected with a fleet from the East. These canoes were chiefly built at the Straits and higher lakes, and came to a rendezvous about where Malden is now located.

The Senecas, not having as good materials, were obliged to make use of log canoes hollowed out of the trunks of trees. These were far more clumsy and unmanageable than the birch ones, the latter being equal in sea-worthiness to the

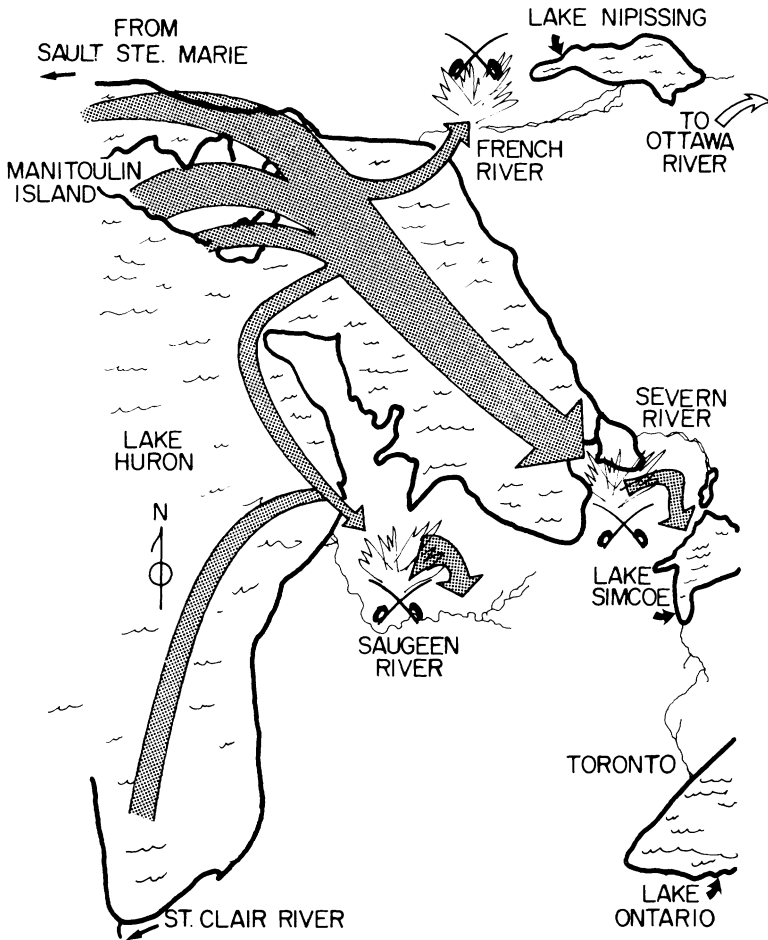


Fig. 1

finest skiffs of our day. . . . Soon a grand maneuver took place. The birch canoe party proceeded to the end of the Point, and in full view of the enemy put out directly into the lake. The Senecas immediately pursued, and when they had reached about midway of the lake, the birch canoes turned upon them and gave them a battle that could not be withstood. The Senecas were all slain but one man, who was allowed to return and report the catastrophe to his nation.

Schoolcraft (1848:91-94) recorded a more complex Huron version of the dramatic conclusion of the long campaign that completely routed the Five Nations:

. . . the Wyandots had been forced backwards as far as Lakes Huron and Michigan. Here they made an obstinate stand, from which all the efforts of their relentless enemies to dislodge them were ineffectual. Their inveterate hatred of

each other was fostered by war parties of the respective tribes, whose vindictive feelings led them to hunt and destroy each other, like so many beasts of the forest. These resulted generally in favor of the Wyandots, who, inspired by these partial successes, prepared for more active operations. Three encounters took place, on the same day, two being had on Lake Michigan and one on Lake Erie, and which from their savage and exterminating character, closed this long and merciless contest.

While it strains historical credulity to believe that three battles took place on exactly the same date, the account correctly emphasizes the importance of the Hurons to the long Ojibwa war against the Five Nations.

Copway's Ojibwa informants (Copway 1972:88) on the land battles in Ontario also give a great deal of credit to the Huron armed forces:

Forty years had nearly elapsed since the Hurons had been routed, but they had not forgotten the land of their birth — the places that were once so dear to them. The thought of regaining their former possessions inspired them with a courage that faced every danger. They fought like tigers.

Strategically the Hurons helped their Algonquian-speaking allies significantly because they are a major part of a three pronged Ojibwa attack. The southern Hurons were assigned the task of moving north to meet an Ojibwa-Huron force moving south along the eastern shore of Lake Huron. After the two forces combined, they, in Copway's words, "overran the whole of the south of the peninsula."

The Robert and Johnson Paudash account also pictures a complex military plan. After the victorious army has reached Lake Simcoe, and received reinforcements, the forces divide and one unit goes south to Toronto while the other unit fights its way down a long chain of lakes until it reaches the Bay of Quinte in Lake Ontario. Then it is joined by the group that had previously taken over the area around Toronto. The re-combined forces then carry on the war into the homeland of the Iroquois in present New York State.

Copway's (1972:87-88) detailed account presents the most complex picture of the war. At the start the northern army of Algonquians divides three ways, one of which is to make contact with the fourth group, the Hurons coming north from their homes in the south (see Fig. 2).

The first prong of the attack, as Copway tells the story, moves across the French River to the Ottawa River. Because they easily outnumber the Iroquois living this far north, the Ojibwa warriors readily rout them.

The second group of warriors goes south towards the St. Clair River to meet the Hurons. But first on the Saugeen River is a principal village of the Iroquois, and here the terrible battle of Skull Mound takes place. In the middle of the 19th century the artist Paul Kane could still see not only the mounds erected over the slain dead but also a profusion of bones in the area. The victorious warriors were joined then by the Hurons into a force powerful enough to overrun the whole of the south of the peninsula. Copway's account is

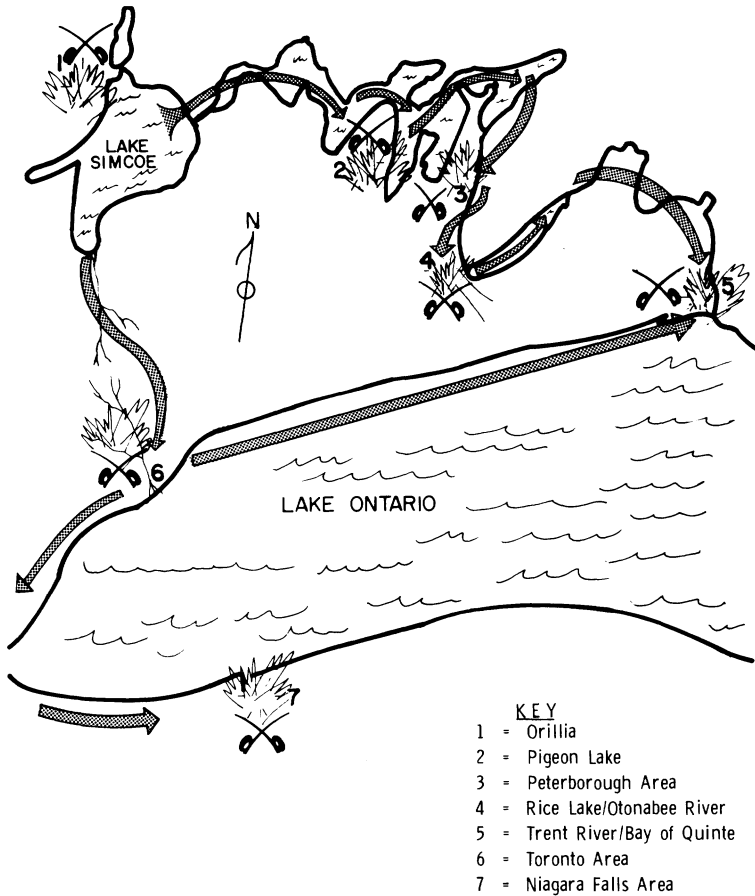


Fig. 2

ambiguous here, and one can read him as paralleling the account of Assikinach in which the combined Ojibwa-Huron force (or some part of it) goes back north to join the third northern arm of the offensive.

This third group in Copway's version had to fight its way to Lake Simcoe which lay on the northwest-southeast lake route that the Iroquois used to travel from Iroquoia to the old Huronia. A series of bloody battles takes place as the brave Iroquois are pushed back lake by lake. This third arm of the Ojibwa campaign had moved down from the Georgian Bay via the Severn River to Lake Couchiching to the entrance to Lake Simcoe at a place directly north of Toronto near present Orillia and close to the present-day Rama Indian Reserve. Large numbers of Iroquois were collected here and stoutly resisted for three days the combined Huron-Ojibwa force. Only a few Iroquois survived.

Moving nearly due east through the chain of lakes the force came to Pigeon Lake where the Iroquois had built a strong fort. "For a time the result was doubtful" but finally the fort was taken by storm. Only a few Iroquois were spared. The victorious Ojibwa and the retreating but fighting Iroquois square off a third and fourth time around present Peterborough. The battle a dozen miles north of Peterborough proved particularly savage as Copway reports that not a male was spared. The next day the battle continued on the site of Peterborough and "an immense number [were] slaughtered."

The Ontonabee River as it connects with Rice Lake southwest of Peterborough saw still another struggle. As several hundred persons were slain, two heaps of bodies were piled up, one for the dead of the Iroquois, the other for the Ojibwas. The remaining Iroquois warriors, Copway writes, were finally "panic-struck" but that seemingly only increased their desperate valor for when the Ojibwa moved from Rice Lake to the Trent River another battle took place and "for two days and nights they fought like wild beasts."

The final battle took place on an island where the Trent River flows into the Bay of Quinte area. Again the fierce hand-to-hand struggles, again the ruthless destruction of all the Iroquois warriors who could not somehow flee. At this point Copway (1972:91) ends his account of the war.

When the news of these victories reached the Mohawks, they were incredulous, but soon learned that the Iroquois were entirely broken up and the country subdued. The war-whoop of the trading Indians and their host abounded.

The last major Ojibwa account of the war is Robert (and Johnson) Paudash's. In many ways it parallels Copway's. Paudash also describes a large force coming down the traditional river and lake route destroying the enemy entrenched along the way. After "various skirmishes" the two forces met in large-scale conflict in the Otonabee-Trent valley where the Iroquois had "numerous villages." Like Copway, Paudash notes two major battles around the town of Peterborough. Like Copway, Paudash describes battles where the Otonabee River connects with Rice Lake. Paudash mentions two further battles on Rice Lake. Like Copway's account the conquering Ojibwas arrive at the mouth of the Trent River.

But Paudash's account continues. The Indians who had gone to Toronto from Lake Simcoe have now reappeared and reinforced the tired and depleted forces that have just fought that long series of battles on the river and lake route. The leaders meet (Paudash 1905:9-10) and:

It being known that the Iroquois would never rest until they should return and attack the Mississaugas, and, perhaps, at a disadvantage to the Mississaugas, the latter decided to advance against the Mohawks and Iroquois generally, beyond the Great Lake. They came upon them at their fort on the Mohawk River, and laid siege to it.

Finally, according to Paudash, the two tired enemy forces decide to agree to a peace.

The long war was over and seeing that Ontario “was full of game and an excellent hunting-ground” the Ojibwas (Mississaugas) decided to settle along the Otonabee-Trent Rivers and along the St. Lawrence to the east. The Ojibwa conquerers, according to Copway, divide up the spoils with the Ottawas and Ojibwas occupying the north and the “Shawnees” [referring no doubt to a group of people and not just to the tribe bearing that name] occupying the south. Jones (1861:113) also has a two-fold division of the lands, although he has one part of the “conquering remnant going west to the banks of the Detroit River while the other goes east to the shores of the St. Lawrence. The Ojibwas “by their prowess, [had] gained the waters of Ontario and Erie” (Copway 1972:3).

The Ojibwa Thesis As Seen by Historians

The view that the Iroquois were pulverized by a confederation of Algonquians led particularly by Indians now known as Ojibwas, can be conveniently labeled the “Ojibwa Thesis,” in honor of the group that both participated most fully in the war and which later best described the war. As we have seen, this latter name, of course, does not mean that the ancestors of the present-day Ojibwas destroyed the Iroquois by themselves for their kin are given full coverage by the Ojibwa informants. Indeed the Iroquoian-speaking Hurons are also prominently featured in the defeat of the Five Nations.

On the other hand, Arthur C. Parker’s *An Analytical History of the Seneca Indians* (1926) devotes not a word to any such major Ojibwa-Iroquois war. Parker describes in detail the devastation by the Five Nations of their Huron neighbors in the 1640s. Then there follows no further martial narrative and the reader supposes that in that geographical area the Five Nations were supreme. Certainly there’s no hint of an idea of a Huron revival. Parker’s historiographical approach to the troubled history of his own and the Huron tribe typifies the average historian’s picture of the relations between the Five Nations and their Indian neighbors. For simplicity sake, let this be called the “Parker Model.”

Calling this view the “Parker Model” does not imply anything except that this is a well-known Iroquois published view of their past military exploits that can conveniently stand for a larger body of tradition. For example, Oronhyatekha (1865:184) similarly speaks of his Iroquois nation subduing nation after nation, “their arms dreaded by nearly all tribes east of the Rocky Mountains.” This Parker model of the ruthless and eminently successful Iroquois war machine accounts for the usual descriptions of Iroquois war parties continually and savagely pursuing and wrecking vengeance on any

Indian group that dared challenge their hegemony. William Brandon's oft-printed *The American Heritage Book of Indians* (1974:190) picks up the logic of Parker's account and describes all the Indians of the Northeast as Ishmaels displaced and rootless, engaging in useless wars on all they chance to meet. According to this view, the Iroquois by adopting European values and tactics have disrupted fatally the lives of those Indians living north and west of them.

William J. Kubiak's informative chart in his *Great Lake Indians* (1970) catalogues the Iroquois punitive expeditions against the Hurons. The sad description of this harried refugee group is finally ended on the note that a pitiable remnant is allowed by a suddenly quiescent Iroquois Five Nations council to return to areas in present-day Toledo and Detroit as owners of a large part of Ohio (Kubiak 1970:172-177).

A glance at any book of maps of colonial North America shows the immediate plausibility of Parker's model. The 1755 map by Nicholas Bellin, is a beautiful map, but one that has the site north of Lake Ontario listed as settled by the Iroquois. The map, moreover, has the land north of southern Ontario marked as "unknown." Whether published in England, France, Germany or America, most of the 18th century maps visually claim the present-day area of southern Ontario for the Five Nations Iroquois, or ambiguously list the land as "the former country of the Hurons."

Elizabeth Tooker, the well-known and highly respected Iroquoian scholar, follows this Parker tradition in her article on "The League of the Iroquois" (1978) in a recently published volume of the Smithsonian on Indians of the Northeast. Her recounting of the League's history neither lists nor hints at any major war — much less defeats — by Algonquians of the North. This same volume also contains an article "History of the Upper Great Lakes Area" by Lyle M. Stone and Donald Chaput (1978) that likewise gives no hint of a major Iroquois confrontation, much less of a major Iroquois defeat.

Bruce G. Trigger's universally praised life-long labor on the Hurons unfortunately suggests the same principle of a centuries-long, all conquering Five Nations. Fellow scholar, C. E. Heidenreich, in a thoughtful review (1977:627-632) for the *Queen's Quarterly* of Trigger's monumental *The Children of Aataentsic* does nothing to suggest that many Hurons fled to their Algonquian neighbors. For both Trigger and Heidenreich the clear implication is that the League simply destroyed the Hurons so completely that they play no further causative role in Northeast Indian politics. For both authors the Hurons are without a doubt the most written about and best known native group of early Canada up to the 1640s campaign against them by the Five Nations. By itself it may be a bit unreasonable to accuse Trigger and Heidenreich of not quickly unveiling the future of the Hurons after the defeats of the 1640s. Certainly, to take a well-known historical example, books on World War I Germany end with the Armistice, but readers know that new leaders will shortly appear on

the scene and an even more powerful Germany will appear on the scene to start World War II. Unfortunately, the Parker model doesn't permit the reader to assume that the Hurons could soon in some significant way fight, much less help destroy the hegemony of the Five Nations.

But did the Hurons ever recover from the lambasting handed them by the Five Nations? Did the Algonquian tribes that took the Hurons into their part of North America ever actually mount a campaign against the Iroquois? And if mounted did the campaign overcome the military superiority of the Five Nations? Both these questions and the traditional Algonquian answers to them are well known to scholars of the Indian Northeast. The problem is that the Algonquian answers do not seem immediately and self-evidently correct.

Nevertheless, a number of historians can not accept the Parker view of continued Iroquois military supremacy. In effect, these historians accept in practice the position that histories of American Native peoples can not be legitimately reconstructed unless oral traditions are carefully investigated. Scholars investigating the Ojibwa of the Southeast face head on the question of the accuracy of the Ojibwa tradition. Edward S. Rogers (1978:760-761) summarizes a minimal position of these scholars:

During the 1690s, some began moving south into extreme southern Ontario and soon replaced, often it appears by force, the Iroquois who had settled after 1650 along the north shores of Lakes Erie and Ontario. By 1702 a group from the mouth of the Humber River had settled near Fort Frontenac at the east end of Lake Ontario and proceeded to terrorize the Iroquois who lived there, destroying their village in 1704. Around 1707 Ojibwa arrived in the Niagara region unopposed by the Iroquois.

Historian Donald B. Smith has extensively researched the Ojibwas of the Ontario area. He also thinks that suddenly in the 1690s the branch called the "Mississaugas" noticed the enfeebled condition of the Five Nations, and unleashed a fierce campaign that completely defeated the Iroquois Confederacy. By 1710, according to Smith (1975b:20-21, 25, 55): "with their Algonkian allies, the Mississauga forced the Iroquois, who had apparently reneged on their promises, to allow them to pass directly through their country 'as far as Albany'." Smith of course, accepts the "accuracy of the native oral [Ojibwa] tradition."

Iroquois capitulation came, according to the Ojibwas (Paudash 1905:9-10), when the League found itself being attacked in its very heartland.

The Mississaugas, realizing that their enemies would never rest until they had returned to avenge their defeat and humiliation, determined to carry the war into the enemy's country. The rival forces met at the Mohawk River in New York State.

Donald H. Kent, the historian for The Indian Claims Commission, in his study of the Iroquois Indians concludes as false the well-known claims of the

Iroquois that they had completely conquered the tribes to the north and west of them. In fact, says Kent (1974:2:13, 16, 19), “the New York Iroquois were on the defensive in their home territory, the Finger Lakes and Mohawk valley region, within forty years of their reputed ‘conquest’. . . .” In particular, within a quarter-century of the defeat of the Hurons, the Iroquois had to watch the French on the Niagara River itself which controlled the important Niagara portage route pass.

The Iroquois Sachems, however played a bluffing diplomatic game with the English at Albany. In June of 1700 the Iroquois envoys calmly announced to the colonial Commissioners for Trade at Albany that they had given permission to the Mississaugas (identified as Ottawas) to settle at present-day Toronto. This was good diplomacy and great public relations and even better historical misrepresentation, but military nonsense.

In passing, it should be pointed out that the Iroquois in 1700 no more controlled the Ohio Valley than they controlled Ontario. In the earlier part of the 17th century they had terrorized the Ohio Valley, but as early as 1686 a Miami war party was seen on the offensive near present Rochester, New York. By 1697 (Kent 1974:1:189)

the Cayugas told the Albany Commissioners that they were ‘menaced by the French and Twightwicks [Miamis] Indians, both our enemies,’ and that the ‘Sinnekes’ had suffered in an engagement with them. In the same year two Susquehannock Indians, Kyanharro and Oriteo, told Governor Markham of Pennsylvania that ‘a certain Indian King (being Kyanharro’s old acquaintance)’ had been attacked by the ‘Titwa’s, the naked Indians’, on his way from the ‘Cayogues.’

The oral traditions of the Delaware recorded by Moravian missionaries (Heckewelder 1819:9-24) firmly insisted that the Delawares had not been militarily conquered by the Iroquois. The Delaware’s exotic rationale for their undoubted role as “women” finds some verification (certainly plausibility) in the Iroquois oral tradition of the “Peace Queen” of Kienuka (see Beauchamp 1965:140-142) which in fact is simply an institutional manifestation of the matrilineal aspects of both Iroquois and Delaware tribal life.

Historians of the Ontario area generally accept the view that the Ojibwas wrestled by force from the Five Nations the area known now as Ontario. Perhaps this tradition was never more authoritatively given than in the following 1895 account by David Boyle (1895:14) as “an appendix to the report of the minister of education for Ontario”:

After the extermination of the Hurons and the Neuters by the Iroquois in 1649 and 1650 respectively, the Ojibways (of various tribes and clans) generally took possession of the Ontario peninsula formed by the Great Lakes. The Iroquois, however, did not readily give up this territory, according to the current beliefs of the Ojibwas, by more than one of whom I have been assured that the claim was ultimately settled by a great battle, in which the Iroquois were defeated, when by solemn treaty both parties agreed to be at peace forever.

However this may be, it is well known that when Canada became British all the Indians with whom the imperial and provincial governments had to deal in what is now Ontario, were Algonkians.

In general, historians studying Indians in Ontario are forced to accept the idea that the Iroquois had been stunned by a monstrous defeat or series of defeats inflicted on them by the Ojibwas and their allies. Percy Robinson (1933:59) represents clearly the general historian's discomfort in relying on an evidential base which his entire training has taught him to avoid, but which in this case at least seems to give a truthful story:

Indian tradition is notoriously inaccurate, but the fact that Copway, himself a Chippewa, in his traditional history of the tribe, asserts that it was in the latter part of the seventeenth century that the Mississaugas expelled the Iroquois from the country north of the lakes, may be allowed some consideration.

Peter Schmalz (1977:3-8) does not shilly-shally over the use of the Ojibwa accounts. His discussion of the Saugeen Indian branch of the Ojibwas centers on these traditional accounts which he employs to give a detailed descriptive account of the beginning of the great campaign of the Ojibwa-Iroquois war.

This acceptance of the Ojibwa position by Ontario historians is not characteristic of all Canadian historians any more than it is characteristic of American historians. Canadian historians, according to James Walker, have a dilemma when they face the question of the Iroquois. On the one hand (1971:28):

According to the space devoted to them, the most significant place reserved for Indians in Canadian history belongs to the Iroquois, and that for their wars against the French. The attitudes and sympathies of Canada's historians are revealed in their choice of descriptions for the Iroquois and their warfare. They are termed the 'Iroquois menace,' 'la nuisance' and 'le peril iroquois', the 'Iroquois peril' and 'pillaging', likened to 'the pirates of the sea', all of which at least imply unprovoked hostility or banditry on the part of the Indians.

From this angle one would have expected Canadian historians to relish and trumpet the stories of any group of Indians that seemingly had destroyed the hated Iroquois. But nationalistic Canadians have difficulty explaining the demise of Iroquois power in the 1701 Treaty through the agency of another Indian group. That is, James Walker speculates (1971:29, 35-37), national pride dictates that (in these early days) Frenchmen be the ones to save Canada's national destiny. Hence the inability to accept the Ojibwa view of the late 17th century that "it was rather they [Ojibwas] who protected him [French Governor] than he who protected them." Hence both the exaggerated importance given by Canadian historians to Adam Dollard's death-to-the-last-man fight in 1660 at Long Sault, and the scant attention given to the numerically larger

number of Huron Indians led by Chief Annahotaha who also perished in the struggle.

The most common Canadian explanation for the 1701 Treaty where the Iroquois had to admit defeat is found in the military fortifications and expeditions of the French. In this view the building of French forts had forced the Iroquois to leave the area north of Lake Ontario. French punitive expeditions then took the war to the League's own homeland and forced them to come to terms. Many American historians, of course, also have accepted this explanation. Recent revolutionary experience, however, vitiates the force of this explanation. An accounting of the various French punitive expeditions simply does not add up to an explanation of why the Iroquois gave up the war. It certainly doesn't follow that Frontenac's 1696 village-burning expeditions forced the Iroquois to their knees. For people as resilient as the Five Nations something more devastating had to happen than "warring against the corn and the bark houses that did not offer resistance like the foe," to quote the 1689 words (Thwaites 1900:64:33) of the Mackinac Indians as reported by the resident Priest, the Jesuit Carheil.

Since Ojibwas partly warred against the Iroquois in order to trade freely with the English at Albany, then the Ojibwa victory over the Iroquois was really a set-back for French commercial aspirations. "Whereas before, Iroquois strength had been the main threat to New France, Iroquois weakness now proved to be an equal, if not greater, menace" (Eccles 1969:135). The Jesuit Étienne Carheil wrote in 1689 from his post at Mackinac that the Indians there openly said that the trade with the English was "incomparably more advantageous to them" than trade with the French. As Bruce Trigger (1971:286) has noticed, the French in reality needed the Iroquois to keep the Algonquians in line: "If the hostile Iroquois had not existed, the French would have had to invent them." Indian tribal politics, as many authors have seen, did not parallel European political divisions. Indian political realities complicate any historical explanation of Anglo-French rivalry in North America. In any case, Ontario historians question the reasons for the fact that "the vast majority of publications deal with the less populous Iroquois in Ontario, rather than the Ojibway who are the most numerous Indians in Canada" (Schmalz 1977:ii).

On the other hand, Harold Hickerson in his sympathetic *The Chippewa and Their Neighbors* (1970) ignores any chance of the Ojibwa (the Canadian name for what Americans call the Chippewa) having crushed the Iroquois military juggernaut. Yet the successful Ojibwa war against the Sioux is fully described and analyzed. But Hickerson makes no attempt to make a similar case for the Ojibwa boast that they are an exception to the rule that Western tribes must concede to tribes east of them with their European supplies and their hardened war experience. It is surely noteworthy when an authority on the Ojibwas writing a general history of the group does not rush to accept the position of John Maclean in his *Canadian Savage Folk* (1971:171):

Eastward and westward the Ojibways travelled, until they were to be found throughout Ontario, Manitoba and the North-West. They carried on an incessant war with the Sioux and Iroquois, the latter being compelled to sue for peace, . . .

Why would Hickerson not build up his subject matter by portraying them as successfully carrying on a two-front campaign against two particularly formidable opponents?

For one thing, Hickerson with his primary interest in Western Chippewas thinks that Indians "were merely pawns" in European struggles, because "they had no control over the areas they occupied" and this may account for the oversight. The Eastern Ojibwas in the 17th century, however, were sovereign lords doing their own will and this freedom would be hard to place in Hickerson's thinking. But there is a more fundamental reason for the oversight. The more important reason why such well-informed ethnohistorians as Hickerson do not readily accept the Ojibwa thesis follows from the general scepticism most historians display toward oral traditions. For most scholars, George T. Hunt in his meticulous *The Wars of the Iroquois* has resolved the question in favor of the League. Hunt bristles at the thought that oral tradition can be legitimately used in history writing. He (1960:9, 181, 187) accepts the dictum of George Hyde, "one of the regrettably few writers in the field of Indian History who has his feet on the ground," that "there is no worse source than unsupported memory or tradition." Hyde had investigated Charles Eastman's statements of Sioux oral tradition and had found Eastman regrettably misinformed. Hunt's general position was actually anticipated by George Copway a hundred years earlier in his *Traditional History* (1972:138) where he protested the views of those who "think we cannot keep the words or tradition longer than one hundred years." Hunt, nevertheless, decided that the Iroquois could not in fact have had the defeat of such magnitude inflicted on them that the Ojibwa tradition outlines. In the last sentence of his influential book, Hunt concludes that the idea of such a huge defeat "is too formidable even to deny."

The early French explorer, Baron de Lahontan, described in detail a severe Iroquois defeat in the northern wilderness in the late 1680s. In his *Some New Voyages* (1905:489-494), Lahontan alleges that the Fox Indians, forewarned by some Ojibwa hunters, crushed a large Iroquois force of a thousand warriors. In itself and if true, this could be considered one proof of the general view that the Iroquois had suffered a series of monstrous defeats at the hands of the Algonquian tribes in the late 17th century. Of more interest here is the fact that this story and its historiography constitutes a model of historical editorializing that is the normal for historians. In his editorial notes on the alleged incident, Reuben Thwaites takes the usual position that the story is of "doubtful authenticity" because the signal victory was not "mentioned in the official documents of the period." Similarly the Lake Superior trader Alexander Henry mentions in his book that he was told a thousand Iroquois died at Point Iroquois

(or "Grave of the Iroquois" as he called it) and to this assertion, the editor of his papers (James Bain) simply puts a footnote listing the number as a hundred!

Proponents of the validity of oral history know that traditional historians consider oral traditions as the least valid form of evidence. For that reason, Hunt's strictures are immediately congenial to the historian. Historians who do base work primarily on traditions, whether oral or written, are labeled "ethno-historians" somewhat to their disadvantage in conservative historical circles. Ethnohistorians, however, have convincingly shown the value of certain types of oral tradition in the reconstruction of the past, particularly in pre-literate societies. Speaking of the Iroquois, William Fenton (1971:129) mentions that "Great heed is paid to verbatim recall; virtuoso performers are honored, and learned arguments vie over variant versions." This can be proven according to Fenton, by the complete accuracy of oral tradition (as substantiated by documentation through journals of Quaker missionaries) regarding the "good message" of the Seneca prophet, Handsome Lake.

Basic to oral historians is the view that people remember what they consider important (Thompson 1978:104):

Although laboratory experiments have succeeded in establishing the main elements of the memory process, they provide a poor guide to its reliability, because they take place in a social vacuum isolated from the needs and interests which normally stimulate remembering and recalling.

Unless the tradition is placed into one official version, a group of people will often in time simplify the story keeping only the essentials. When, in addition, the story is oft retold, variants multiply. One does not go to oral history to learn details or chronology; one generally goes to it to learn the general outlines of a historical situation. When, for example, the Wyandots told James B. Finley (n.d.:62), their resident missionary, that the leader of the Indians who defeated General St. Clair in Ohio was a Mississauga, then one may at least assume that it was a traditional belief that the Mississaugas were a particularly effective military tribe.

In addition, the Ojibwa tradition was not quite completely oral. The bark "writings" of the Ojibwa were well known to Schoolcraft and distinguished the Ojibwas from their Indian neighbors (Schoolcraft 1848:203).

Of all the existing branches of the Algonquin stock in America, this extensive and populous tribe [Ojibwas] appears to have the strongest claims to intellectual distinction, on the score of their traditions, so far, at least, as the present state of our inquiries extends. They possess, in their curious fictitious legends and lodge-tales, a varied and exhaustless fund of tradition, which is repeated from generation to generation. These people possess also, the art of picture writing, . . . Warriors, and the bravest of warriors, they are yet an intellectual people.

Copway, as one might expect, spends a good deal of time in his *Traditional History* discussing these bark writings and how they contribute to the continua-

tion of true and correct traditions. Moreover, the Ojibwas, in common with their neighbors, had wide experience with messages delivered through wampum belts. According to the long account by Jones (1861:118-122), the original treaty ending the struggle between the Iroquois and the Ojibwas as well as its many confirmations were enshrined in wampum. The Wyandot historian, Peter Clarke (1870:66), tells of that tribe possessing an "international repository or archives" in which seventy years of material was collected and which formed the basis of his history. The continuing importance Indians give to these memory aids can be seen in the present project of the Center for the History of the American Indian at the Newberry Library where wampum belts are being sought as part of a documentary history of the Iroquois.

In the case of the Ojibwa and Huron traditions, many of the technical difficulties concerning the validity of an oral tradition have been surmounted by the fact that the transmitters of the tradition (Copway, Warren, Jones, Paudash, Clarke) were themselves respected members of the Indian community, and Schoolcraft was married to an important Ojibwa. There is a very high probability that they accurately knew the tradition. Credible historical research based on oral traditions necessarily demands that thorough expertise that comes only from an intimate knowledge of both the culture and its language.

Moreover most of these same transmitters were partly European, scions of respected colonials. As such they knew and were imitating the art of writing history of the European sort. Peter Jones, for example, was the offspring of a Provincial Deputy Surveyor and a daughter of a Mississauga Chief. Warren went to school in New York City. Both Copway and Jones married educated women and both travelled extensively overseas. When Copway lectured in Boston in 1849, Longfellow entertained him in his home. Élemire Zolla's (1973:238) analysis of Copway's religious material points out that Copway is no naive woodsman for "his book, though quite chaotic on the surface, becomes coherent, carefully elaborated to demonstrate without openly saying so, the superiority of the natives."

Copway's or Clarke's historical sophistication can best be appreciated by comparing their historical writings with David Cusick's *Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations* (1976). Copway (1850:14, 44-47) distanced himself from the traditional Indian tale by his self-conscious scientific approach.

With these traditions there are rules to follow by which to determine whether they are true or false. By these rules I have been governed in my researches. The first is to inquire particularly into the leading points of every tradition narrated.

A comparison with Copway's own earlier composed *The Life, Letters, and Speeches of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh* (1850) reveals his later success in his *Traditional History* in telling a coherent historical account. In *The Life, Letters and Speeches* (1850:14-15, 44) Copway had completely misconstrued the relationships between the Ojibwas and the Hurons, an error easily made since the

same word “Nodoway” applies to both the Hurons as well as to the Five (Six) Nations Iroquois. Evidently then, Copway can not be considered the last word; but of course, no informant or historian can be.

For the Ojibwas living in Ontario in the 18th century that historically important story concerned itself with their occupation of old Huronia down to the northern shore of Lake Ontario. Of necessity, the Ojibwas in Ontario (the Mississaugas) need remember the basis of their land claims. It is thus eminently reasonable that the Ojibwas there would have often “reminisced” on the subject, probably evolving a simplified, more functional version of the great events that gave them their homeland. That this happened in fact can be seen by the relatively large number of accounts that have come to us. Copway, Jones and Warren wrote general histories incorporating the Ojibwa conquest of the Iroquois. There simply are too many parallel Ojibwa versions, supplemented by too many supportive versions from other sources, to be ignored or easily discredited by historians. La Potherie (1911:1:280), an eyewitness, correctly stated that the Ojibwas came to occupy the land because “they were the first to defeat the Iroquois.”

Evidence Supporting the Ojibwa Thesis

The commonsense editorial position that oral tradition must be judged in the light of the written word must not be allowed to destroy the Ojibwa thesis ipso facto through an overzealous application of a historical methodological principle. Since “Indian history is a thing of tradition,” then there will never be an “Indian History” if these traditions are not analyzed closely and with respect. What must be avoided is (Vansina 1971:442) that “prejudice of contempt for the spoken word” for “any historian who deals with oral tradition will have to unlearn this prejudice.” In fact, the principles of validating oral history do not vitiate the Ojibwa thesis.

Certain known facts about the Iroquois Five Nations support the Ojibwa view. By every standard the most important historical proof would be that one already mentioned by David Boyle; viz., that after the American Revolution the British government had to buy land in modern Ontario from the Mississaugas in order to relocate the Iroquois loyal to the crown. The Mississaugas were paid 1,180 pounds for the lands they ceded at a council attended by both the British and Six Nations’ officials. Ironically, some Mississaugas were forced after a number of years to seek a refuge with the Canadian Iroquois of the Grand River Reservation. These Ojibwas successfully appealed according to Horatio Hale (1974:91) to this treaty, an appeal they nevertheless supported with the evidence of the wampum-belts.

The Treaty of 1701 clearly marked “the eclipse of Iroquoian power.” French forts certainly contributed to the defeat, but could hardly be the chief

cause for stopping a guerrilla-like war. Certainly the Five Nations later never felt they had been destroyed by the village-burning Sullivan campaign of the American Revolution. The Ojibwa Thesis, on the other hand, *would* explain the 1701 Treaty.

The Iroquois Book of Rites was composed in the decade or two after the 1701 Treaty. The Onondaga version (Hale 1974:59, 153; Maclean 1971:157) of the chant speaks of such a sad state of affairs that the Ojibwa Thesis implies:

Woe! Woe!
 Harken ye!
 We are diminished!
 Woe! Woe!
 The cleared land has become a thicket,
 Woe! Woe!
 The clear places are deserted.
 Woe!
 They are in their graves —
 They who established it —
 Woe!
 The great League.
 Yet they declared
 It should endure —
 The great League
 Woe!
 Their work has grown old.
 Woe!
 Thus we are become miserable.

Iroquois historiography suffers from a “structural amnesia” in regard to the Iroquois-Algonquian war, but this contemporary religious ceremony rather clearly evokes the unfortunate result of a catastrophe.

The Iroquois admitted to the English in the year 1711 that they were reeling in their heartland under the attacks of Indian enemies who “now twelf times fallen upon us & kill’d of our men.” Evidently these were difficult times for the Iroquois. Diplomatically, they did their best to disguise this diminution of their power. Even so (Kent 1974:1:185),

In fact, the British were quite aware that there was nothing real about the claim that the Six Nations owned land in the area on the basis of conquest. It was convenient and expedient in the eighteenth century to use these claims based on alleged seventeenth century conquests in order to support British claims against French claims to sovereignty; and it was also easier to deal with the New York Iroquois than with other Indian groups. But these officials did not deceive themselves about the Iroquois claims.

After all, their bitterest enemies the Hurons were safely living in the Detroit area; their old trade rivals the Ottawas were wheeling and dealing all over the Great Lakes. In short, something — or combination of things — caused the

League to lose its power. The Ojibwa thesis would explain a good part of this decrease of power.

While Parker's "analytical" approach to Iroquois history makes no mention of any Ojibwa invasion, the potpourri of tales collected by William Beauchamp (1965:136-137, 140-141) alludes a number of times to at least a serious struggle between the two groups. For example, the Iroquoian tale of "The Algonquin and Wan-nut-ha" incidently mentions that "for fifty years the Algonquins had waged a terrible offensive war against the Iroquois." The most important of these slips of Iroquoian folklore comes from the hands of David Cusick, an old Tuscarora in 1825. Cusick (1976:20, 27-28, 70) says a history of the Iroquois was a difficult endeavor because of the "fables" met. While Cusick's jumble of events in a matrix of hopelessly wrong dates forms an invaluable point of reference for the polished story presented by the Ojibwa Copway, Cusick's material has a relatively heavy emphasis on the Twakanka, a term applied by the Iroquois to all western Indians, but used by Cusick for the "Mississaugas." He has, for example, the Mississaugas on the Niagara River at an early date. Moreover

About this time the Twakanhah or Messissaugers began to wage a war against the five nations; the Senecas on the frontier were most engaged in the warfare. After various skirmishes the enemy was so excited that they determined to destroy the fort Kauhananauka (now in Tuscarora near Lewiston) [but fails]. . . . , but the commotions were not quelled, small parties of the Senecas often take the canoes and go by water to the head of Ontario lake, in search of the enemy, but they avoid the attack of superior force . . . [Iroquois collect army of two thousand warriors but retreat after a "desperate contest" with a "strong force of the enemy."]

These troubles between the Iroquois and the Mississaugas occur, Cusick continues, shortly after "the Ottawahs become numerous and powerful nation, occupied an extensive country lying between the Lake Erie and the Ohio River, and was supposed their national force amounted to about 4,000 men."

Two caveats must be entered here. The Ojibwa view does not mean or imply that the Iroquois did not continue to remain as individuals and as a group, excellent warriors, greatly feared and militarily aggressive or that the Iroquois had never secured some temporary form of hegemony. Nothing, for example, in Copway's account would indicate anything other than a universal heroism among the Iroquois. Later Ojibwa accounts list "Point Iroquois" in Lake Superior as the site of the last great Iroquois-Ojibwa confrontation (1660s) in the traditional heartland of the Ojibwas. Earlier the place was called "the Grave of the Iroquois" to emphasize the great numbers who died there. The distance from the Genessee River area to Point Iroquois illustrates the great courage of the Iroquois warriors. After Nicholas Perrot (1911:181) described this defeat, he concluded on the cautionary note that: "It is said that the Iroquois have not dared since that time to enter the Lake Superior, but in truth they have never set any limits. . . ." These thrusts and counter-thrusts partially account for that

absence of human habitation in the dense woods of southern Ontario that the Dollier-Galinée Expedition of 1669-1670 discovered.

Warren (1885:147) mentions the ambiguous military aftermath that followed even the peace after the ending of the great Ojibwa-Iroquois war of the 1690s:

From this time, . . . , the route from Lake Superior to the French settlement on the St. Laurence became comparatively free and open, though the trading parties were often waylaid by the ambushed warriors of the Iroquois on the Ottawa River.

The Ojibwas long continued to eye nervously the Iroquois, for as late as the 1830s the Ojibwa “villages at Rice, Mud, and Scugog lakes have been known to be temporarily deserted merely from the prevalence of reports that the Mohawks were coming.” As late as the 1840s, Peter Jones still spoke of the “smothered feeling of hatred and enmity” between Iroquois and Ojibwas “so that when either of them comes within the haunts of the other they are in constant fear.” James Beaven at the same time in his *Recreations of a Long Vacation* (1846) talked about the formal enmity (“they were sure to fight”) between the Ojibwas and Iroquois.

Moreover the Iroquois did dominate events in present-day Ontario for several decades after the destruction of Huronia in the middle of the 17th century. As Keith Otterbein (1964:56-63) has already pointed out, the Iroquois did possess for certain periods superior tactics. Chief Blackbird’s account of the Ottawa-Iroquois skirmishes around Lake Michigan both describes the “great disaster” in war “sometimes” inflicted by the Iroquois while at the same time Blackbird insists that the “Iroquois were not able to conquer them or drive them from the country.” Mosang Paudash’s short account of the Ojibwa-Mohawk struggle for Rice Lake describes a situation that evolved over some years. For first, according to Mosang, “there had been for some time a jealous feeling existing,” which “like a smothered fire had burnt in the heart of each, without having burst into a decided flame.” Then dramatically in Mosang’s version comes a great massacre of Iroquois by Ojibwas in retaliation against what they judged to be Iroquois provocations. The Ojibwa accounts make no attempt to have the Iroquois crushed right after the annihilation of Huronia, but rather these accounts talk of a slow build-up of events to a sudden and dramatic military conclusion.

Even in the relative lull after the Iroquois destruction of Huronia and before the Ojibwa conquest of Ontario, the two future combatants increasingly traded blows as equally fearless military groups. Nicholas Perrott’s unforgettable anecdote of a large party of Ojibwas being temporarily paralyzed by a party of only sixteen Iroquois can seem to point to overwhelming Five Nations superiority. Yet the really significant thing is that the party of Ojibwas did proceed forward. Even Pierre Radisson’s account of a similar experience

happening to another group of Indians about the same time (the early 1600s) still has a large percentage of the group continuing despite Iroquois military presence. Moreover the year before the above Ojibwa-Iroquois incident, Perrot says that the Ojibwas at Sault Ste. Marie had ambushed and totally annihilated an Iroquois war party.

The Ottawa tale, "The Magician of Lake Huron," which was collected by Schoolcraft (1848:175-178), actually incorporates the historical sequence of initial Iroquois domination followed by Algonquian counter-offensive. At first the tale says that "it happened, by the fortune of war, that the Ottawa tribe were driven off that chain of islands [Manitoulin] by the Iroquois, and obliged to flee away to the country lying between Lake Superior and the Upper Mississippi." After a fight with some fairies and after a spirit gives a gift of corn, the Magician announces that "I will go over to the Nadowas [Iroquois] living at Penetanguishine" and he kills them.

Hurons, as every Ojibwa was acutely conscious of, were also an Iroquoian people for before their 1640s humiliation at the hands of the Five Nations, the Hurons (in Copway's words) "had made depredations upon the Algonquian tribes in the south, north, and west." These Iroquoian-speaking people insisted in their own oral traditions that they completely recovered from those mid-17th century defeats administered by the Five Nations. Henry R. Schoolcraft (1839:22, 31, 50) recorded the generalized Wyandot version of events subsequent to the Huronia 1640 debacle:

. . . and led to their expulsion into the region of the upper lakes, even to the farther shores of Lake Superior. They were, however, supported by all the influence of the French, and by the whole of the confederate Algic tribes, and finally fixed themselves upon the Straits of Detroit, where they were privileged with a high political power, as keepers of the great council fire, and enjoyed much respect among the Western tribes through the whole of the eighteenth century.

Schoolcraft's summary is even more valuable because he realizes the difference between "oral imaginative lore," "class of oral fictions" and factual accounting of historical events.

Hurons under the protection of Algonquians early recovered from the demoralizing defeats of the 1640s. The Baron de Lahontan, whose writings on the Northeast "bear the stamp of verity," very much extols the 1680s Huron leader Kondiaronk for his skill in diplomacy. In command of a hundred Hurons, Kondiaronk insisted with the French "that the War should not be put to an end till the *Iroquese* were totally routed." In pursuing this end, according to Lahontan's (1905:220) version, Kondiaronk used "a malicious Strategem . . . to prevent the conclusion of a Peace between Mr. *de Denonville* and the *Iroquese*."

Peter Clarke (1870:39, 62-66) in his *Origin and Traditional History of the Wyandotts* claims to validate this tradition of a successful reversal of earlier

Iroquois victories. He tells us that in 1775 some Senecas appeared to instruct the Wyandots that they were subject to the Iroquois. The Wyandots in turn called for the oldest man in the town to appear and describe how in the early 1700s (1701) he saw the great battle where the Wyandots and Chippewas crushed the Senecas. Then a wampum bead belt was produced and it was explained to the Senecas that this was the peace belt given them by the Senecas in the peace proceedings following the great battle. "Sullenly" the Senecas, Clarke finishes, withdrew from the camp. Then twenty years later, Clarke again describes the Iroquois leader Captain Brant trying to form an alliance with the Ojibwas to destroy the Wyandots. Brant's emissaries are called before the Ojibwas where "aged members of the tribe were sent for to tell the council what they knew from memory about a compact between the Ottawas, Chippewas, Potawatomies and the Wyandots. . . ." Again, tradition recalled, thwarts the Iroquois.

Clarke's views are later repeated and substantiated by the long-time early 19th century Methodist missionary to the Wyandots of Upper Sandusky, Ohio, James B. Finley (n.d.:95, 105), who was convinced that "as to the extent of the Iroquois in the west, and the influence they exerted over other nations, we think Mr. Thatcher's [a historian of the last century] account somewhat exaggerated." Finley had seen many occasions when Wyandot chiefs informed their neighboring Senecas that the Iroquois there "had no right to sell their land without the consent of the Wyandot chiefs, for they at first only borrowed it from them."

In any case the Huron's successful recovery from the shellacking received in 1649 needs explanation. Copway puts the answer in the briefest terms: "the chief cause of their subsequent success, which was the fact of their having enlisted in their favor the Ojibway nation." Copway's answer finds general confirmation in Clarke's Wyandot history. In a fiery clash between Wyandot and Algonquian leaders in the 1790s, Clarke (1870:61) pictures his tribe losing the debate when:

"Listen!" replied one of the opposition party, "when you Wyandotts found your way here from another country, fleeing from your enemies, the Senecas and their allies (some of the Six Nations), you found protection here," suiting the word to the action, "under my arm."

Clarke's confirmation of a tradition that certainly does not glorify his own tribe is particularly noteworthy since oral traditions have increased credibility where self-humiliation is acknowledged.

Unless one completely reorients oneself through the use of all tribal traditions, the tendency will be to fall easily into Parker's published Iroquoian model. Authors note that the Ottawa suffered in turn a double whammy from deprivations of both the Iroquois and the Sioux to become the middlemen in the fur trade. How two-time losers could come to occupy such an important

position is not broached in the usual explanation of the Ottawa. For Indian middlemen are not simply tattooed merchants or shopkeepers grasping for profits, according to Ray (1978:30, 32):

These middlemen traders differed from their European counterparts in terms of their economic behavior. Since the middlemen refused to take any more goods than they could use themselves, . . . it follows that most of the goods that the middlemen groups would have passed on to the other inland trapping bands would have been used.

In fact, Ottawas became so powerful because they had joined with their kin (Ojibwas and Potawatomis) into the powerful confederation known as the Council of the Three Fires. Chief Andrew Blackbird (1977:81) (Ottawa) in his *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan* relates that:

Quite often, the Iroquois would attack them [Ottawa], but the tradition says that in almost every battle the Ottawas would come out victorious over the Iroquois. The Ottawas too, in retaliation, would go to the Iroquois country to scalp some of the Iroquois, . . .

Perrot [judged by George Hunt (1960:20, 181) to be “without question the best authority of his century on Indian life”] gave credence to what the old men of the Ottawas told him concerning a great defeat of the Iroquois, and there’s no reason for any historian to do otherwise. Excluding the dates, always a serious problem in any oral history, and remembering that an oral tradition tends to simplify the story, then there’s solid reason for believing in the validity of the main thrust of that old “Anishinabe” Algonquian tradition that the Five Nations Iroquois were soundly defeated in a war with the combined Algonquian tribes. Allen Salt’s (Chamberlain 1888:150) two sentence summary of his Mississauga tradition correctly tells a historical fact:

According to tradition, the Ojibwas of Lake Superior came in bark canoes to Georgia Bay, and destroyed the Iroquois, as the latter had done to the Hurons. At the same time the Northern Ojibwas followed the course of the rivers running southerly, destroying their enemies.

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