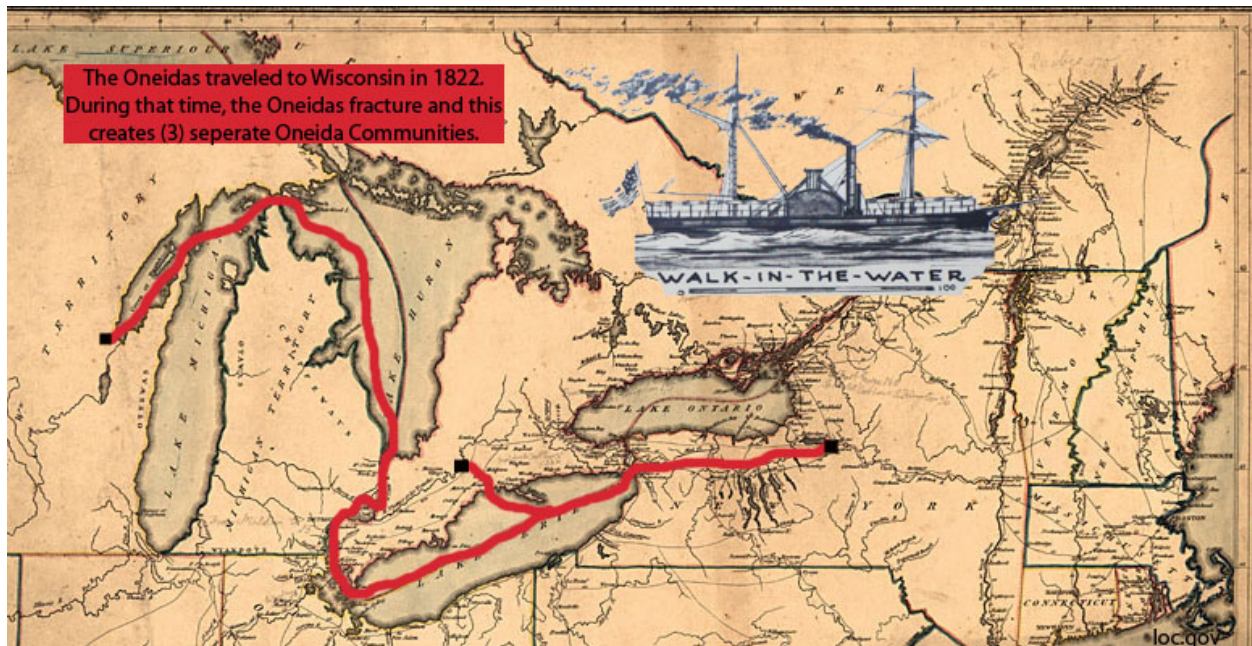




Oneida Cultural Heritage Department

By: Dr. Carol Cornelius, Oneida Cultural Heritage Department Area Manager
Edited: Judith L. Jourdan
Edit, Revision, and Layout: Tiffany Schultz (09/13)

FORCES THAT IMPACTED ONEIDA'S MOVE TO WISCONSIN



EXAMINING THE FORCES AFTER THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION WHICH IMPACTED OUR MOVE TO WISCONSIN

Introduction

As Oneidas of Wisconsin we have generally been taught that our ancestors became Christians and followed Eleazar Williams to Wisconsin and left behind our traditions and culture. The historic records actually present quite a different picture.

First, there were four major forces impacting our removal to Wisconsin: 1) U.S.

government policy and treaties, 2) New York State treaties, 3) Ogden Land Company complicity, War Department policy, and 4) the Church. Eleazar Williams was the person used to implement the policies of all those who sought to obtain our land by removing us from New York State.

Second, it has always been my wish to understand, from our own ancestors, why they would agree to such a dramatic move from our homelands. Researchers in the Oneida Cultural Heritage Department spent several years researching historic documents to find whatever

we could to gain some insight into what our Oneida ancestors were discussing and feeling which resulted our move to Wisconsin.

The cultural continuity which is evident in our Nation certainly shows that we did not leave out traditions, our language, nor our culture, behind. Historical documents verify that after our move we continued to govern our Nation with Chiefs. We had clans, we certainly continued our language, we grew corn, beans, and squash, our women wore traditional clothing, we made maple syrup, and our ceremonies continued but were held secretly. In fact, to the present day we uphold the Oneida values of our ancestors.

FEDERAL POLICY EQUALS LOSS OF LAND AND REMOVAL

The United States Removal Policy was designed to move ALL Indians west of the Mississippi River. We all know about the Cherokee Trail of Tears in the 1830's. Well, our Oneida "Trail of Tears" began to take place in 1822.

The federal government began taking Native land through treaties after the American Revolution, even though the U.S. recognized the Oneida's loyalty to the colonial government in treaty. The Oneida and Tuscarora nations shall be secured in the possession of the land on which they are settled. However, after the American Revolution we went from 5.5 million acres down to 250,000 acres and that dwindled to 32 acres by the early 1900s.

The Oneida Nation was included in the following federal treaties:

- Treaty with the Six Nations, 1784 (Fort Stanwix)
- Treaty with the Six Nations, 1789 (Fort Harmer)
- Treaty with the Six Nations, 1794 (Konondaigua)
- Treaty with the Oneida, February 3, 1838 which established our reservation in Wisconsin

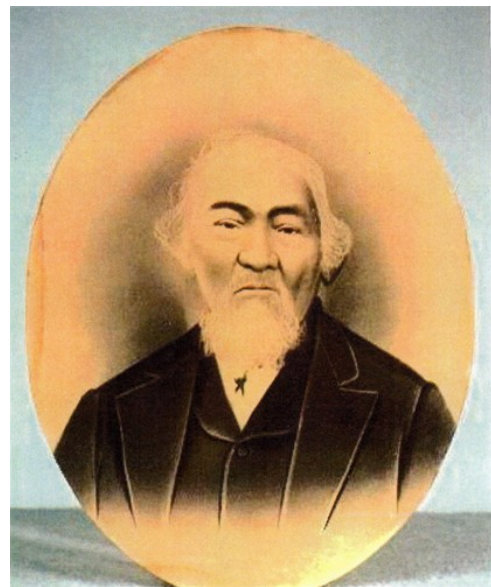
NEW YORK STATE POLICY EQUALS LOSS OF LAND AND REMOVAL

New York State concurred with the federal government in its desire to remove all the Iroquois out of New York State.

Prior to our move to Wisconsin there were fourteen treaties made with New York State (1785-1817) which reduced our land base. Just one treaty, the 1788 Treaty, ceded 5 million acres, thus, reducing our land base to 250-300,000 acres. To read the list of treaties and what happened, how land was lost, is heart breaking.

New York State continued making a series of Treaties from 1824-1846 which eventually reduced our original homelands to 32 acres in the State of New York.

New York State treaties made after 1790 were illegal because the 1790 Trade and Non Intercourse Act said treaties could not be made without a federal representative, but New York State disregarded the 1790 Act. This Act and Article II of the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua form the basis for our land claims.



Chief Elijah Skenandoa

In the 1830's when Chief Elijah Skenandoa moved to Wisconsin, he brought with him seven original treaties and the Oneida Tribal Belt, which documented the reunification of the Six Nations. Those Treaties were all made with New York State including: 1788, 1795, 1798, 1802 (March 5), 1802 (June 4th), 1810, and 1811.

Attached to these Treaties are signatures of our ancestors for annuity payments from 1797 through 1857. I had the great pleasure of going

to the Newberry library and holding these treaties in my hands and reading them.

OGDEN LAND COMPANY-WAR DEPARTMENT

Church documents and Eleazor Williams papers document the collusion between the Ogden Land company, Eleazor Williams, and the War Department:

In the early 1800's, pressure by white opportunists increased to take over what remained of the Oneidas' land in New York. In 1810, the Holland Land Company, which had obtained the pre-emption right of purchase of the Indian Lands from Massachusetts and from the State of New York, sold all of their pre-emptive rights to David Ogden of the "Ogden Company" for 50 cents an acre. Another large purchase was made of the Indians by Phelps and Gorham of nearly all of the lands east of the Genesee River.

Until 1817, the Ogden Company had succeeded in extinguishing all but a part of the Indian title to the rich land, the large reservations of Cattaraugus, Alleghany, Tonawanda, Tuscarora and Buffalo still remaining. In 1817, renewed efforts were made by the Ogden Company to persuade the New York Indians, with the consent and cooperation of the War Department, to move to a new home in the West and relinquish their old home in New York. (Ta Luh Ya Wa Gu Holy Apostles Church Mission to the Oneidas 1822-1972:3)

Eleazor Williams writings show that he corresponded and met with ...the Hon. Mr. Calhoun then in the War Department. And by whose invitation, I visited Washington during the winter 1820. The various interviews I had with the Secretary of War on the subject of my inquiry were so satisfactory as to relieve my mind from the anxiety which I had...on the subject...information as to the ultimate object of the government upon her present policy of removing the Eastern Indians to the west. I was kindly entertained by President Monroe and the Secretary of War while in Washington, and my several members of congress... (Eleazor Williams Papers Appendix 2: pg.9)

Eleazor continues stating that, On my return to New York, I had several interviews with Thomas L. Ogden Esq., a gentleman of

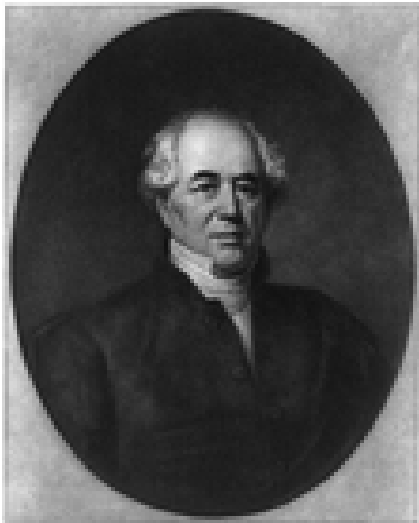
great respectability, whose land interest was involved with a certain company who had purchased the preemption right to the Seneca's lands in the state of New York...The plan of the government of removing the New York Indians to the west, was to them a favorable omen. (EW Papers, Appendix 2: pg.10)

In 1833, Eleazor Williams wrote a letter to Ogden stating: I have relied much upon the promises of the different trustees ever since in 1819 for assistance in the "great cause" in which I have been engaged and ultimately with a liberal and handsome compensation. I have, however, found to my mortification that instead of receiving that support which I expected, (altho, an interst of their's nearly half-million, as it is said at stake) I have been compelled to spend all the property I had. To effect the treaty in 1821 and the following year, I expended a little sum of my own money. I have been often surprised that a business of this magnitude of importance to the company should have been transacted for a sum so much less than that which the present Secretary of War stated to the Hon. D.A. Ogden, who in his letter (dated at Detroit January 29, 1819) says, It is all important that four or five thousand dollars should be reserved from the consideration money, to be distributed in presents to the Indians, Without this little can be expected. With it everything may be hoped.

Now instead of this sum of twelve thousand dollars, as it was explicitly stated to me by Mr. Ogden at Utica in June 1820, was the sum anticipated by the company would be necessary to procure a location for the Seneca's...And on my part, in consequence of the past promises of the trustees of the assistance which was to be given to me (from time to time) and 'ultimately, a liberal and handsome compensation,' I have endeavored to my utmost to save the expenses of the company by blending the interest of the Seneca's with the other branches of the six nations, the expenses of the company have been greatly lessened and their object has been attained at the expense of other tribes. I have endeavored to serve them more than 12 years and actually left the pleasant valleys of Oneida for his western wilderness and have suffered much in health and reputation...(EW, Appendix 1: Sept. 1833)

In 1849, Eleazer Williams writes: Since my last, I have discovered among my papers a copy of the several payments made to me by Mr. T.S. Ogden, which my belief is a true statement, if my memory is not at fault.

It is clear from the above statements that Eleazer Williams was paid by the Ogden Land Company to remove our ancestors to Wisconsin. He had full knowledge of the complicity between the Ogden Land Company and the War Department.



Eleazer Williams, 1852

MISSIONARY/CHURCH POLICY AND ELEAZOR WILLIAMS

The missionaries' goals were to "civilize" the Oneida people through education, religious instruction, and to teach them how to plow and raise cattle. They sought to change the roles of men and women by having the men do the agricultural chores, which had been the Iroquois woman's domain, and the women were to stay in the house doing the cooking and sewing.

The plan of collecting the Indians, somewhere in the westward, now...into one body for the purpose of educating them and for religious instruction, would be more convenient and at less expense. The least and most successful means which could be employed by government and religious societies to civilize the Indian was to born them to cultivate the soil, as the white do. (EW, Appendix 2 pg. 4-5)

Therefore the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge, and Northern Missionary Society in the state of New York came to the Oneida to observe and devise a plan to civilize the Oneida. By his (Rev. Dr. Morse) I called a general Council of the tribe...(EW Appendix 2 pg.4)

OUR ONEIDA ANCESTORS PERSPECTIVES

Given the pressures exerted on our Oneida ancestors by the U.S. government removal policy and treaties New York State wanting the entire Six Nations removed, and using the treaty process to get our land, the Ogden land company, the churches and their agent Eleazer Williams – what were our Oneida ancestors thinking, discussing, and experiencing that made them decide to move to Wisconsin?

There was an invitation from the Western tribes, but the War of 1812 delayed discussion of this topic. Meanwhile the U.S. government purchased some of the lands offered to the Six Nations.

The vast loss of land through the treaties with the U.S. government and New York State, the lands of our Oneida ancestors had dwindled to a mere fraction of its former size. With the continuance of treaty making, in fact there were two treaties made in one year (1802), it was clear that the loss of land would continue.

Due to the loss of land there was a scarcity of timber. With the loss of land there was most certainly a loss of the natural environment needed to support the Oneida people both culturally and economically. The Europeans were cutting trees in large numbers to build their own towns and to send back to Europe. The trees provided the natural environment for plant, animals, fish, and medicines which Oneida people utilized on a daily basis. The animals were fleeing north where there were more trees. Once a natural environment is disturbed the entire ecosystem is destroyed and changed. The natural resources that thrived in that ecosystem were no longer available, thus negatively impacting the life support systems of the Oneida people.

The awareness of change and the plan for survival. *The Chiefs and sensible men among these tribes, to a great extent, feel that a change*

in their situation has become necessary, that they must quit the hunter, and adopt the agricultural state, or... (EW Appendix 2 pg. 2)

The novelty of changing the place of residence, which the minds of the younger part of the several tribes had been excited, was not so easily abated. They saw enough in their present condition, the necessity of such a change was impelled by a sense of duty as well as interest, to exert, to obtain that which their elder chiefs were not able to accomplish in consequence of the policy of the state and territorial governments. This subject was actual in agitation among them... One thing I had already seen that to save the Oneidas there must be change, either the place of residence or their morals. As I had already been successful in the latter, so I conjectured they may so still be improved as to prevent the necessity of the former. (EW Appendix 1:8-9)

The feelings of the Oneida & Stockbridge Indians on the subject of obtaining a tract of country to the west of theirs and their children's future residence and other tribes who may choose to emigrate thither. (EW Appendix 1:9)

The Oneidas feelings of nationhood and survival are expressed in a letter from Eleazor Williams to Rev. Father in 1833...and the great exertion of the Chiefs to keep their people together, is worthy of all praise. (EW-MS: 2)

It is very apparent the Oneida people were worried about having a land base for future generations. They were discussing the very survival of the Oneida people.

The continuation of the present ways (1820) "will prove to their destruction" Statements were made regarding moral issues because behavior had degenerated. The concern was that married couples were splitting up and living with new partners. The feeling was expressed that the best thing to do would be to move away from the white man's influence.

Alcohol and rum were major problems as Eleazor Williams describes: *Arrived at Oneida Castle March 23rd, 1816, announced by a crier to the Nation. 'I now discovered for the first time, that the invitation my coming thither originated principally from the pagan party of the nation whose numbers were about six hundred, which is one half of the nation' had*

visited back in autumn in 1814. First Christian party more drunkenness than the pagan party at this time, 'it would seem that the exhortation of the late Allegany Prophet had still restrained the pagan party from running into the same excess with those who bear the honorable name of Christian. (EW MS:62)

The "Allegany Prophet" referred to here is Handsome Lake. In Handsome Lake's teachings, from his vision in 1799, came the prohibition on alcohol because it was destroying the people. There is one reference with an incomplete date, Oneida Castle (181?) regarding charity towards the destitute and needy. (EWMS: 23)

All of these factors pertaining quality of life and economics must have had an impact on the decision to move. So often throughout the history of Native Peoples along the east coast of the United States, there is reference to moving farther west to escape the negative impact of the Europeans ways and alcohol.

Opposition to moving. The Oneida Chiefs sent letters to Washington stating Eleazor Williams did not represent all Oneidas and that many were opposed to removal.

Eleazor Williams states in a letter to Right Rev. Sir, *As the time of my contemplated departure for the westward, is drawing nigh...You are doubtless apprised of the circumstance of a certain portion of the Oneidas being partially opposed to the plan which I had in view. In order, therefore, to give weight to a matter of this importance, and to show them that my going thither has your sanction, it is my wish that you may write to them a friendly letter giving the subject your approbation, and me, orders to proceed. (EWMS: 24)*

On my return to the Oneidas in a council I unfolded to them the views of the General government in regard to their removal to the west...the chiefs and the warriors were divided on the subject. Many powerful arguments were offered on both sides. The discussion for two days was animated and interesting in the extreme. The St. Regis Indians were no less so. The opposition party there was more powerful, as they were aided by the British agents and the romish missionaries. EWMS:60)

As early as 1818, the Oneidas voiced their opposition to moving west: *A group of we*

Oneidas petitioned President James Monroe to the effect that they were gaining in civilization on their present reservation, and they feared that a quick move would be a threat to their progress. They asked the president to block any steps for their immediate removal. (Horseman)

In 1821, the Oneida and Onondaga Chiefs wrote to the president that Eleazor Williams was...contriving a plan to get us from our land and have us settle among the wild Indians of the west. (Oneida and Onondaga Chiefs to the President of the United States, August 8, 1821)

The Chiefs expressed their desire to stay in New York despite the shrinking land base: *Enclosed with the petition was a report from the Hamilton Missionary Society members to their chief to the same effect stating that 'attempts have been made to excite the Oneida Tribe of Indians...to sell their reservation and remove to Green Bay...which is contrary to the wish of the Nation.'* (Members of the Board of the Hamilton Missionary Society to the Rev. Obediah Brown, August 18, 1821)

Contrary to the popular belief that the First Christian Party willingly moved, there is evidence that members of the First Christian Party did not agree, and in fact, opposed to move.

In 1821, an unauthorized delegation of Oneida (First Christian Party), Seneca, St. Regis, Six Nations, Stockbridge, and Munsee traveled to Green Bay and signed the August 18, 1821 Treaty with the Menominee and Winnebago. Upon their return they...found much difficulty in giving satisfactory explanations. Movers in the opposition caused a written remonstrance against the whole proceedings to be circulated, which was largely signed, in which quite a number of the First Christian Party joined. This remonstrance was a free indictment of Mr. Williams, who was characterized as chief instigator of a scheme to rob the Oneidas of their homes, and make them a kind of wanderers and vagabonds of the earth. (Ellis: 336)

On January 22, 1822, the Oneida Chiefs wrote to the President of the United States that Williams was scheming with speculators of the Ogden Land Company to remove the Oneidas, and that Williams "was a tool of this company." (Oneida Chiefs to the President of the United States, January 22, 1822) (Microcopy M-221,

Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, National Archives)

Eleazor Williams was paid by both the Ogden Land Company and the U.S. government to look for lands near Green Bay, Wisconsin. (Horseman: 102, Ellis "Recollections of Williams": 333-334) In fact, Eleazor Williams submitted a claim for \$10,026.43 for services as a delegate. This claim was "contested...strenuously" by the First Christian Party saying Williams had negotiated treaties "on behalf of the St. Regis tribe, and not for the Oneidas, and also that he had been fully paid by the Oneida Nation for any and all services." (Claim No. 20, First Christian Party, 1838)

ONEIDA VOICES IN WISCONSIN

Our ancestors were seeking our survival as a people. The historical documents do not record or provide minutes from Oneida Council meetings during this time period. We have to search the historical records for any information that would give us an indication of the events, pressures, and people who were involved in making decisions.



Chief Daniel Bread

After we lived in Wisconsin a short time, another attempt was made to push Oneida people even further west. Two Oneida leaders document this topic: Daniel Bread made a speech at a Grand Council of Indians held in 1836 before the Governor, Father: What we have long feared has at last come to us. We have just settled in this country; have hardly laid

down the packs from our shoulders and recovered from the fatigue of our journey here, when you wish us again to remove. It is discouraging. It discourages those that have come, and those that are behind.

Father: the white men are powerful, and they are very rich. You can turn the river of the water; you can dig away the mountain; why then do you want the little spot that we have. It is but a little time since, and we possessed the whole country; now you have gained all but a few spots. Why will you not permit us to remain?

Father: We are thankful for the good example of the white man. They have taught us to cultivate our lands; we wish to follow that example still; we have felt the effects of removal. It is like the feather, we may soon be blown beyond the Rocky Mountains.

Father: We are in great distress. We go to our work, and while cutting down the trees, it seems as if a whip were held over us. Something tells us, 'this is not yours.'

Father: You promise us a good country beyond the Mississippi. We are satisfied with the soil and climate where we now are, and besides how can we live in peace with the natives there? In former years, they have had war with our people; we killed many of them; blood is yet on the knife. How can we meet them in peace?

Father: We have long shown our good feelings to the white men, by giving them room. We have given them lands, until they have a greater country than Great Britain. It is not yet full. Why then will you not suffer us to remain? The white people in our neighborhood do not disturb us; we wish to live with them still; we want to remain where we are. (Oneida, The People of the Stone: 28-29)

Chief Cornelius Hill also made a powerful speech protesting the attempts to remove the Oneida people further west: *The whites are not willing to give us time to become civilized, but we must remove to some barbarous country as soon as civilization approaches us. The white claim to be civilized, and from them we must learn the arts and customs of civilized life.*

The civilization which I and the greater part of my people aim at is one of truth and

honor; one that will raise us to a higher state of existence here on earth, and fit us for a blessed one in the next world. For this civilization we intend to strive – right here where we are – being sure that we shall find it no sooner in the wilds beyond the Mississippi. 'Progress' is our motto, and you who labor to deprive us of this small spot of God's footstool will labor in vain.

We will not sign your treaty; no amount of money can tempt us to sell our people. You say our answer must be given today. You can't be troubled any longer with these Council meetings. You shall have your wish – and it is one that you will hear every time you seek to derive us from our lands – NO! (Oneida, The People of the Stone: 30)

The forces impacting the removal of the Oneida people to Wisconsin were complex issues including governmental policies, land companies, and church policy. Each of these entities had one goal in mind – to get Oneida land by removing the Oneidas to the West. Obtaining Oneida land was disguised under the umbrella of Christianity and civilization, but the objective was clearly to get Oneida land.

Bibliography

Ellis, Gen. Albert G. "Recollections of Rev. Eleazor Williams," Wisconsin Historical Collections, Vol. VIII, 1908.

EW = Eleazor Williams Papers, Appendix 1 or Appendix 2. Special Collections, Univ. of WI. Green Bay, WI.

EWMS = Eleazor Williams Manuscript; Special Collections, Univ. of WI. Green Bay, WI.

Horseman, Reginald. "The Origins of the Oneida Removal to Wisconsin, 1515-1822," An Anthology of Western Great Lakes Indian History, Donald L. Fixico, ed. University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, 1989.

Oneida – *The People of the Stone*, The Church's Mission to the Oneidas. Oneida Indian Reservation, Wisconsin 1899.

Ta Luh Ya Wa Gu Holy Apostles Church Mission to the Oneidas 1822-1972:3. Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, National Archives