

**Polishing the Silver Covenant Chain: An Address by Sir
William Johnson to the People of Kahnawake
and Kanesatake, 1762¹**

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In May of 1762, towards the end of the Seven Years' War, Sir William Johnson – English Superintendent of Indian Affairs for North America – delivered a Silver Covenant Chain address to the Mohawk people of Kahnawake and Kanesatake, two settlements near Montreal.² Kahnawake and Kanesatake, known historically as “Caughnawaga” and “Oka,” are familiar to us from the “Mohawk Crisis” of 1990. In 1763, one year after Sir William delivered his address, France and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Paris. This settlement brought nearly a century of protracted warfare between these two great colonial powers to a close. We are all acquainted to some degree with the role the Iroquois played during that long conflict. Indeed, the Iroquois were distinguished allies of both the English and the French and enjoyed wide, even legendary acclaim for their war fighting skills. Much less celebrated and certainly much less well known, are the many attempts on the part of these same Iroquois to establish peaceful relations and alliances with the Europeans. The Silver Covenant Chain treaties were one such attempt.

The Silver Covenant Chain councils were conducted in the way of the Haudenosaunee, as the Iroquois call themselves. Typically, both parties delivered carefully constructed addresses and solemnized agreements with the ceremonial giving and receiving of wampum belts. Speakers employed vivid religious language and imagery, either Iroquoian or Christian or both.

For the Haudenosaunee, the Silver Covenant Chain councils touched the very heart of the sacred and the spiritual in their lives. In fact, the records of these councils provide valuable insight into the thinking of the Haudenosaunee and our European forebears as well. Discussion of these councils has remained outside the area of church history, however, primarily because the key officials participating in them were military rather than ecclesiastical. Though missionaries and church authorities were sometimes present at the proceedings, their direct contribution to the discussions was minimal.

In this paper I will explore some of the many dimensions of Sir William Johnson's Silver Covenant Chain speech. I will look first in some detail at the historical context and background within which the Silver Covenant Chain treaties took place. I will then consider the text itself, focusing on those to whom the speech was addressed – the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non – and on Sir William's use of the Iroquois Condolence Ceremony.³

After 1776, once the Americans gained independence from the English Crown, the Silver Covenant Chain fell into disuse and faded from the historical record. Though colonial officials saw the diplomacy of the Silver Covenant Chain as an effective means to build a relationship with the Iroquois, neither the government of the United States nor, later, the government of Canada, found it practical or especially relevant to their aims and ambitions. The Iroquois would not be involved in the business of nation building and the Silver Covenant Chain would not figure in the new political arrangements then in the making. As we shall see, however, the Silver Covenant Chain is much more than some quaint historical curiosity; for many Haudenosaunee it is as valuable today as it was over two hundred years ago. The Mohawk Crisis of 1990 is a striking example of its potential usefulness for our time.

Trade Relations and Alliances

According to the historical record, the Silver Covenant Chain treaties began in 1677 on the initiative of Sir Edmund Andros, then the English colonial governor of New York. Indeed, Sir Edmund has been described as the “architect” of the Silver Covenant Chain.⁴ These treaties were not land claim settlements, but diplomatic agreements designed to create an alliance between the English and the Five Nations Iroquois

Confederacy. In one sense the treaties were quite pragmatic. Both the English and the Iroquois wanted peace and stability for trading purposes and they needed each other to accomplish this goal. Trade was, to be sure, *the* dominant factor in the diplomatic relations between the Europeans and the Native peoples of the Northeast.

As it turns out the Covenant Chain treaties did not create universal or even lasting peace because a third party, the French, also sought a land and trade advantage and an alliance with the Iroquois. In 1684 an Onondaga chief attempted to bring New France into the Covenant Chain, but the French crown rejected membership.⁵ The French made use of the Chain only occasionally thereafter preferring, instead, to cultivate a relationship based on conversion to Christianity and the close personal contact characteristic of mission life.

The political implications of the Silver Covenant Chain have been discussed at length in the scholarship. The Chain's religious side has also been mentioned. One historian notes that during the 1670s, "In the towns of the Five Nations, as support for the English and their Covenant Chain waxed, enthusiasm for the French and their religion waned."⁶ Why? Part of the answer may lie in what Silver Covenant Chain diplomacy hoped to achieve. Its main purpose was not to convert the Iroquois to Christianity (though conversion was not unwelcome), but to create a meeting of minds. In this sense the Haudenosaunee and the English came together less as "heathen" and "Christian" and more as equals. Unfortunately, the ends to which the English used the Silver Covenant Chain were not always magnanimous; the English were, after all, in competition with the French for possession of a colonial empire. Nevertheless, the actual councils give us a glimpse into how the English and the Haudenosaunee communicated with one another.

"Linked Arms," "Joined Hands"

As I said at the outset, the Silver Covenant Chain councils were conducted in the way of the Haudenosaunee. The Haudenosaunee brought the traditions of the Five Nations Confederacy and the Great Law of Peace to the councils. These traditions shaped the councils and gave them their structure. "Covenant" has a very special and important meaning in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and we will look at this in a few minutes, but the meaning of covenant in this particular context is best seen first through

the eyes of the Haudenosaunee. The word “chain” and its synonym “rope” are key to our investigations. Both are used metaphorically by the Haudenosaunee. As linguists note, “The basic principle of Iroquois metaphor is the projection of words about familiar objects and relations into the fields of politics and diplomacy.”⁷ Thus, “Literally translated from its roots the word for *chain* in Iroquoian language means something like *arms linked together*.”⁸ The concept of “linked arms” dates to the very origins of the Five Nations Iroquois Confederacy.

According to the oral history of the Haudenosaunee, the Five Nations Confederacy came into being many, many centuries ago – no one knows exactly when – when a young Huron man named the Deganawidah or the Peacemaker, travelled to the lands of the Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Seneca, bringing to them a message of peace. A state of endemic warfare plagued the peoples of these five different nations at the time. In order to make his message more meaningful, the Peacemaker looked to the everyday world of the Iroquois and in it found many “objects” which could be transformed into powerful symbols of peace. One was the household fire around which families, clans and communities gathered daily for warmth and to cook, eat and talk. With the Peacemaker, this everyday fire became the “central fire” of the Great Council of fifty chiefs. The chiefs met around the fire to discuss matters of importance to them and their nations. Topics for discussion were passed around the council circle and “thrown” across the fire for confirmation.

The Haudenosaunee made a record of this momentous development, and that record is the Circle Wampum. “Of all the Iroquois wampum records this is the most sacred . . .” writes Mohawk author and historian Ray Fadden. He continues,

When the Confederacy was formed, the Peacemaker had each of the fifty chiefs join hands in a circle and he ordained that all should be of equal rank and carry individual titles . . . The large circle formed by two entwined strings, means respectively The Great Peace and The Great Law . . . The fifty wampum strings [which hang from around the circle to the centre] represent the fifty Chiefs of the Confederacy.⁹

Among the Five Nations the notion of “joining hands” or “linking arms” created a relationship which can be described as “covenantal.” This is to say, the relationship was personal and involved both promises and

obligations. When the fifty chiefs of the Great Council joined hands in a circle they were entering into a personal, life-relationship with one another. They were also entering into the promises of the Great Peace and the obligations of the Great Law. Just as the strings of the Circle Wampum are entwined, the Great Peace and the Great Law were intimately intertwined. No separation between peace and the law is discernable.

As the Great Peace and the Great Law took hold, the Iroquois began to join hands with their neighbours. Historian Daniel Richter notes many

. . . of the same principles and ceremonies of peace that sustained amicable relations among the Five Nations applied when leaders . . . dealt with peoples outside the League. Indeed, treaty making was essentially an extension of the Great Peace to a broader stage. The Condolence rituals, words of peace, and exchanges of gifts mandated by the Good News of Peace and Power provided the basic paradigm for diplomatic relations with outsiders.¹⁰

Continues Richter, “Words of peace and gifts of peace . . . were inseparable; together they demonstrated and symbolized the shared climate of good thoughts upon which good relations and powerful alliances depended.”¹¹

From Iron to Silver

During the colonial era, the Great Peace was extended to yet another stage in the diplomacy of the Silver Covenant Chain. The ceremonies at these councils “were modeled upon the rites of the Great League of Peace and, for the Iroquois, helped to make the Covenant Chain a partnership much like that among the Five Nations.”¹² At these councils with the English, Iroquois orators recited the history of their relationship with the Dutch of New Netherland and it is here we find explicit reference to the “chain” and “rope” metaphors. According to the historian Francis Jennings, “Iroquois traditions, repeatedly recited and recorded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, affirm a progression of trading alliance with the Dutch from rope to iron chain.”¹³ One Iroquois orator described how his people had made a “General Covenant” with a Dutch trader known as “Governor Jacques.”¹⁴ Exactly when this General Covenant occurred is a matter of some discussion in the scholarship, but the treaty records indicate that by 1643 the Iroquois and “all the Dutch”

had entered into an “iron chain” alliance.¹⁵

This, then, is part of the historical background to and the setting of Sir Edmund Andros’ Silver Covenant Chain. We do not know exactly *what* Sir Edmund Andros was thinking when he initiated the Silver Covenant Chain councils, but we now know *that* he was drawing either explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously, on the history of Iroquois relations with other nations. The Iroquois saw their relationship with the Dutch and the English in terms of the “rope” and “chain” metaphors. The idea of the Confederacy *circle* does not seem to be explicit here. The bond thus created with the Europeans was not identical to that of the Circle Wampum, but the rope suggests a certain “entwining” and the chain a kind of “linking.”

The fact that the Covenant Chain became “silver” was, however, an important development and the metaphorical polishing the Silver Covenant Chain became integral to the ritual of these councils. The imagery is quite exquisite – with each exchange of wampum, with each expression of condolence and with each step toward peace, the Silver Covenant Chain “brightened.” The mutual “polishing” of the Silver Covenant Chain helped deepen the bonds between our two peoples.

Covenant or Federal Theology

There is, of course, another important source of covenant thinking and that source is the Bible and the covenant theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Just how important was the idea of covenant during this period? In 1954 H. Richard Niebuhr published an article in which he discussed “The Idea of Covenant and American Democracy.”¹⁶ Niebuhr suggested that the idea of covenant was “a *fundamental* pattern in American minds in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.” As the religious thought of this period “is being more adequately explored,” he wrote, “other studies are beginning to contribute to our knowledge of this idea.”¹⁷ Continues Niebuhr,

The idea of covenant had many proximate sources as it was developed in the Netherlands, in England, and in America during the seventeenth century. It had roots in Calvin; it was suggested and influenced no doubt, by the development of contract law and of commercial companies; it was raised to special significance in religious circles by

the reaction against a mechanical version of Calvinistic determinism. But its chief source in the Scripture was available to all . . . and not only available but pervasively present.¹⁸

During the Reformation the idea of covenant was employed in several different ways; by Zwingli to defend infant baptism; by Bullinger to justify the making of confederacies; by Calvin as a theory of history; by Olevianus and Ursinus in the Heidelberg Catechism. The church historian David Weir notes that after 1590 the covenant idea began to blossom all over Europe with such fecundity “it is impossible to keep track of the manifold uses and conceptions of the covenant motif.”¹⁹

Several recent studies draw a distinction in covenant theology between the idea of a “unilateral” covenant (God’s unconditional promise to humankind) and a “bilateral” covenant (God’s conditional promise to humankind and humankind’s response to it).²⁰ The unilateral covenant is associated with Calvin and the Genevan theologians; the bilateral covenant with Zwingli, Bullinger and the Rhineland theologians. Bullinger’s covenant theology, which is also known as “federal” theology, enjoyed wide appeal, particularly in the Lowlands. In the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries clergy of the Dutch Reformed Church were advancing Bullinger’s writings to congregations both from the pulpit and in publications. Covenant theology of the federal kind was taught at Dutch universities. From 1609 to 1620 these same universities gave refuge to the English Puritans before they emigrated to North America and brought covenant theology with them.²¹

All this raises some interesting possibilities for the present discussion. Were those Dutch traders who encountered the Iroquois in the first few decades of the seventeenth century familiar with the teachings of covenant theology? Did “covenant” or analogous terms figure in the charters of the Dutch trading companies as Richard Niebuhr suggests? Sir Edmund Andros, a Roman Catholic who came from Guernsey, is reputed to have made himself quite unpopular with both the Puritans and colonial Anglican church authorities. Did he nevertheless know something of federal theology? Did the concept of covenant find yet another place to flower in the Silver Covenant Chain?

In other words, did the concept of a bilateral covenant play a role in relations between the Dutch and the Iroquois and later between the English and the Iroquois? The idea seems to fit well with Iroquois notions of

exchanging gifts and words of wampum and more generally with the kind of relationship they hoped to establish with other nations. As we shall now see, the sense of a bilateral relationship goes deep, very deep into the history and traditions of the Haudenosaunee. This is amply illustrated in the Covenant Chain address delivered by Sir William Johnson to the Mohawks of Kahnawake and Kanesatake in 1762.

Sir William Johnson's Speech

Though the Mohawk people were part of the original Iroquois Confederacy, the French and the English considered the Mohawks of Kahnawake and Kanesatake as somehow separate from the Five Nations. Since the two settlements were in New France, both the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non were regarded by the Europeans as allies of the French. This alliance was thought to have distanced the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non from the Confederacy. Moreover, because the Roman Catholic Church operated missions at the two settlements – the Jesuits in Kahnawake, the Sulpicians in Kanesatake – both groups were viewed as Christian. Like other colonial officials Sir William Johnson frequently referred to the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non as the “Praying Indians.” While there is plenty of the historical evidence to support these views, we cannot presuppose the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non were allied with the French to the exclusion of the Five Nations Confederacy. Also, we should not presuppose that the so-called “Praying Indians” had given up the teachings and traditions of the Confederacy for Christianity.

When Sir William addressed the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non, he had a multi-fold task before him. Historically, both groups had played an active role in safeguarding the island of Montreal and its inhabitants. These two settlements were, therefore, considered strategically important to the French and to the English as well. By 1762 as the defeat of New France appeared imminent, the English looked to secure an alliance with the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non. Sir William's speech was part of an ongoing alliance building project, as it were.

The very structure of the speech suggests Sir William felt he had to address the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non in the way of the Haudenosaunee, their close association with the French and the Roman

Catholic Church notwithstanding. The text indicates the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non were quite familiar with the Silver Covenant Chain and with the Condolence traditions of the Confederacy. At the same time, Sir William assumed they were good Christian believers. For this reason he employed considerable Christian language along with all the customary Iroquois imagery. Interestingly, he appealed directly to their Christianity and in so doing managed to lift the discussion out of the quagmire of Protestant-Roman Catholic antagonisms.

Sir William opened his address with an apology for his absence. He had evidently been detained elsewhere on pressing business and had assigned his deputy, Daniel Claus, the important duty of delivering the speech. The council was held in Montreal. The proceedings probably took an entire morning or afternoon to complete. With each pledge and with each expression of hope, peace, and friendship, Daniel Claus "threw" a belt of wampum. A total of three strings and fourteen belts were presented to the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non.

The transcript indicates the people of both communities were facing numerous difficulties and obstacles. Disease, likely small pox, had recently swept through the region taking the lives of many people. After his apology, Sir William moved immediately to Iroquois Condolence Ceremony. "As I understand by Capt Claus that you have (since my leaving Canada) lost a great many of your people to sickness, for which I am sorry, I now take this opportunity by him of condoling your loss, & wiping the Tears from your Eyes so that you may look up to the Divine being & crave his blessing . . ." ²² With this Daniel Claus threw three "Very long Strings" of wampum.

Sir William was most concerned with the Warriors and their intentions vis-à-vis the English. Would they hold to their commitment of "peace lasting" or would they act in an "unnatural" way against the English? With one belt of wampum, he reiterated promises he had made a year earlier. With another, he thanked the Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non for "gathering together and burying the bones" of dead English soldiers. He reciprocated by metaphorically gathering up and burying the bones of dead Warriors. With another belt, he "strengthened" and "brightened" the Covenant Chain so all would be "one people with us." He presented two more belts praising the Warriors for "maintaining peace and friendship" and for "the sincerity of their professions . . ." ²³

Lest any evil remain in their hearts Sir William, "by this belt of

Wampum,” cleansed the bodies of the Warriors of any remaining “ill humours,” and “washed” *all* the people “with that pure Water which your Ancestors made use of on all such occasions.” With yet another belt he dispelled “that dark Cloud which hung over” the communities so the people could “enjoy the pleasant and enlivening sunshine.” With still another he “newly repaired” the “Road hither” making it “level, smooth & wide,” so “that you, and we may travel it with safety . . .” In so doing he removed the “many stumps” which obstructed the path.²⁴

Alcohol abuse was prevalent in both communities and Sir William announced he had prohibited entirely the selling of all spirituous liquors. He then warned the Kahnawa’kehró:non and the Kanesata’kehró:non against accepting favours and support from the French and encouraged them to “follow . . . hunting, planting and Trade . . .” so they might not depend on others for their basic wants.²⁵

He thanked the both communities for “delivering up” English prisoners of war and apologized for any abuse of Mohawk prisoners at the hands of the English. He also thanked them for encouraging the Abenaki (who were also considered “Praying Indians”) to make peace with the English. Sir William concluded the address by noting he had met with the Six Nations in Albany. He announced “every thing relative to peace, friendship, Trade, etc. had been fully settled . . . [with them].” He expressed his hope for the Kahnawa’kehró:non and Kanesata’kehró:non to also settle in this fashion.²⁶

The Peacemaker and Hiawatha

When, at the beginning of the address, Sir William ‘wiped the Tears from the eyes of the Mohawks’, what was he doing? What did this mean? For an answer, we must return briefly to the story of the Peacemaker.²⁷

On his journey through the Five Nations, the Peacemaker met a man whom he named “Hiawatha.” During their first encounter the Peacemaker helped Hiawatha change his habits (Hiawatha was a cannibal), and then commissioned him to find Atotarho, an evil wizard with seven crooks in his body and a tangle of snakes on his head. Hiawatha was to transform Atotarho’s evil ways by combing the snakes from his hair. In fact, “Hiawatha” means “he who combs.” No sooner had Hiawatha set out than he learned of the untimely death of his daughters, deaths caused by Atotarho’s evil powers. Stricken with grief, he began to wander aimlessly through the

forest. Each night he stopped at the woods' edge and lit a fire as a sign to passers-by. He hung three strings of wampum from a horizontal pole hoping someone would take them and console him in his grief.

One day the Peacemaker saw the smoke of Hiawatha's fire and heard him speaking. "This would I do if I found anyone burdened with grief even as I am. I would take these shell strings in my hand and condole with them. The strings would become words and lift away the darkness with which they are covered. Holding these in my hand, my words would become true." The Peacemaker then

came forward and taking the strings . . . and holding them . . . he spoke, string by string, the several Words of the Requickenening Address . . . "I wipe away the tears from your face," he said, "using the white fawn-skin of pity . . . I make it daylight for you . . . I beautify the sky. Now you shall do your thinking in peace when your eyes rest on the sky . . ."28

Thus was Hiawatha relieved of his grief. He continued on his journey and completed his commission. He combed the wizard's tangled hair and like Hiawatha, Atotarho gave up his evil ways.

This, then, is the story of the Condolence Ceremony. For the Seneca historian John Mohawk, this ceremony delivers an important message of hope. He describes the encounter between the Peacemaker and Hiawatha as a "powerfully emotional transaction." Writes Mohawk,

Speaking directly to Hiawatha's despair and his hopelessness, the Peacemaker uses soothing words and sincere caring . . . The message in this transaction is a very important one which needs attention in the area of political theory. The Peacemaker and Hiawatha seem both conscious of the fact that human beings reach places of psychological pain, or feelings of rage, or despairing of hope. They recognize that at such times it is difficult to reach clear thinking and they direct a considerable amount of attention to the pain which is being felt . . . By countering the grief, by showing caring and a commitment to brotherhood, the Peacemaker brings Hiawatha from a place of despair eventually to a place of hope.²⁹

When, many centuries later, Sir William Johnson wiped the tears from the eyes of Kahnawa'kehró:non and the Kanesata'kehró:non he was

speaking out of this history and these traditions of the Haudenosaunee. Just how familiar Sir William was with the story of the Peacemaker and Hiawatha is unclear, but in one way or another he understood the intent of the Condolence Ceremony. He added, however, some Christian imagery to the ceremony; Sir William wiped the tears from their eyes so they could “look up to the Divine being & crave his blessing . . .”³⁰

Mixed Imagery

This use of Iroquois and Christian imagery raises some delicate questions. In his landmark study on the history of the missionary-Indian encounter, *Moon of Wintertime*, John Webster Grant notes, “Any group of people belonging to a culture will inevitably interpret a message originating elsewhere in terms of familiar concepts and assumptions, for no others will be available to them.”³¹ Grant had Native conceptions of Christianity in mind when he wrote this, but in the case of the Silver Covenant Chain councils and Sir William Johnson’s address in particular, his observation can apply as much to the English as to the Iroquois. Was Sir William himself interpreting the Iroquois Condolence Ceremony in terms of Christian concepts and assumptions?

Grant also raised the problem of “illegitimate syncretism” and “authentic Christianity.”³² Is this mixed imagery an indication of one or the other? Did the “Praying Indians” of Kahnawake and Kanesatake find relief from their suffering in the words of the Requickening Address or in craving the blessing of the Divine being? Finally, and most importantly, I think, was this juxtaposition of Iroquois and Christian imagery a way for two peoples of two very different cultural and religious traditions to speak a common language, to account for one another’s beliefs? Each knew the customs and ways of the other. The idea of “looking up” was common to both – the Iroquois to the sky, Sir William to the Divine being. The Requickening Address is explicitly Iroquoian, but the idea of “seeing” and “hearing” more clearly is very much a part of the Christian tradition as well (Matt 13:15-16).

Each reference in the speech, from “gathering up the bones of the dead,” to “purging the heart of evil,” to “pure water,” to making the road “level, smooth & wide,” can be discussed in much the same way as we have just looked at the idea of covenant and the words of Condolence. Take, for example, the ceremony At The Woods’ Edge which is usually

performed in conjunction with the Condolence Ceremony. In this instance, the speaker tells of rocks and fallen trees on the pathway and describes how the people “cleared the road” to ease their journey through the forest. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah wanted “clear a road through the wilderness,” and “make the uneven ground smooth,” (Is. 40:3-4); and like Hiawatha, he yearned to make the crooked straight (Is. 42:16; 45:2).

The Silver Covenant Chain and the Mohawk Crisis

Two hundred and thirty-five years, a lot of history, and more social, religious and political change than our forebears ever imagined possible have occurred since Sir William Johnson delivered his Silver Covenant Chain address to the people of Kahnawake and Kanesatake. Given the nature of our relations with the Haudenosaunee in the recent and not-so-recent past, interpreting this address and others like is far from straightforward. Ours is a pretty miserable record indeed! The Silver Covenant Chain councils can be interpreted as a concrete example of the imperialist intentions of the English. Critics can legitimately argue that Great Britain turned to the Silver Covenant Chain solely for utilitarian purposes: When the English required the services of the Iroquois they polished the Covenant Chain; once the war was won, so to speak, the Iroquois were quite literally pushed aside.

Not all Haudenosaunee see the Silver Covenant Chain or the councils of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in such a negative light. While some of the language (the word “children” for instance) and the explicit use Christian imagery are not acceptable today, the concepts of friendship and peace which the Silver Covenant Chain once captured and reflected are still valid. Not only are these concepts valid, they may in fact be extremely valuable for relations between our two peoples today. The “Mohawk Crisis” of 1990 is a case in hand.

In the months and weeks before 11 July when the Mohawk Crisis began, as we heard and read news reports of mounting tensions between the Kanesata’kehró:non and the Oka town council,³³ the *Northeast Indian Quarterly* (a journal published out of Cornell University) featured an article by Richard Hill entitled “Oral Memory of the Haudenosaunee: Views of the Two Row Wampum.”³⁴ Richard Hill, Tuscarora, is an artist and historian.

Though he was very much aware of the situation in Kanesatake at

the time, Hill made no specific reference the community or to events then occurring. Instead he addressed the wider, equally pressing problem being raised by those events – public attitudes toward Native people and the state of relations between the Haudenosaunee and white society as a whole. “Oral Memory of the Haudenosaunee,” addresses many interesting, sensitive concerns not the least of which is oral memory versus documentary evidence and how Native scholars interpret one and the other. A detailed discussion of this question must be left for another time, however. The role history, tradition and of course the Silver Covenant Chain play in the contemporary context is the focus of our attention just now.

For Richard Hill, Condoled Chief Jacob Thomas and others quoted in the article, the Silver Covenant Chain offers our two peoples a way through misunderstanding, false assumptions and prejudice to friendship, “good minds” and peace. In the early-seventeenth century, according to oral memory, when the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch became acquainted with one another, they came to an agreement whereby each would respect the customs, beliefs and laws of the other. Each people had a row; each row represented a river; each river contained a vessel and each vessel held the laws and beliefs of each people. These are the two rows of the Two Row Wampum. At the same time, the Dutch and the Haudenosaunee joined hands “to show the Covenant Chain that binds our friendship so that we may walk upon this earth in peace, trust, love and friendship . . .”³⁵ This Covenant is a three link chain. The first link stands for friendship, the second for “good minds” and the third “means there will always be peace between us.”³⁶

For Richard Hill, the Two Row Wampum with its ideas of mutual respect for each other laws and beliefs, and the Covenant Chain with its notions of friendship, good minds and peace, are “a reminder that at one time our nations and people coexisted.”³⁷ Our two peoples not only coexisted, we somehow managed to address the problems and issues which confronted us in a manner acceptable to both parties. The Covenant Chain helped us overcome differences and provided the common ground for constructive dialogue. In this there is a lesson from history and, perhaps, the inspiration for our relations in the future.

Endnotes

1. I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and helpful advice of Dr. Edward J. Furcha, Professor of Church History, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University. Sadly, Dr. Furcha passed away on 4 July 1997.
2. Milton W. Hamilton, ed., *The Papers of Sir William Johnson* (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1951), X: 445-449.
3. Kanetsata'kehró:non and Kahnawa'kehró:non mean, respectively, the people of Kanesatake and the people of Kahnawake.
4. "Persons Participating in Iroquois Treaties," in *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy: An Interdisciplinary Guide to the Treaties of the Six Nations and Their League*, ed. Francis Jennings (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), 229.
5. "Descriptive Treaty Calendar," in *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, 161.
6. Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 141.
7. "Glossary of Figures of Speech in Iroquois Political Rhetoric," in *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, 115.
8. "Glossary of Figures of Speech in Iroquois Political Rhetoric," in *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, 116.
9. Tehanetorens (Ray Fadden), *Wampum Belts* (Onchiota, NY: Six Nations Indian Museum, 1972; reprint, Ohsweken, ON: Iroqrafts Ltd., 1983), 6-7.
10. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 41.
11. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 48.
12. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 141.
13. Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 55.
14. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 89.

15. "Descriptive Treaty Calendar," in *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, 158.
16. "The Idea of Covenant and American Diplomacy," *Church History* 25 (1954): 126-135.
17. Niebuhr, "The Idea of Covenant and American Diplomacy," 130.
18. Niebuhr, "The Idea of Covenant and American Diplomacy," 130.
19. David Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 115.
20. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought*, 26.
21. For a discussion of Bullinger's federal theology see, Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).
22. *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, X: 445.
23. *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, X: 445-446.
24. *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, X: 447.
25. *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, X: 447, 449.
26. *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, X: 448-449.
27. The following is paraphrased from Paul A.W. Wallace, *The White Roots of Peace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1946; reprint, Saranac Lake, NY: The Chauncy Press, 1986).
28. Wallace, *The White Roots of Peace*, 24-25.
29. John Mohawk, "Prologue," in Wallace, *The White Roots of Peace*, xviii.
30. *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, X: 445.
31. John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 250.
32. Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 251.

33. Readers may remember the Oka municipal council approved a request allowing the expansion of a privately-owned and operated golf course. The golf course is situated in the historic Commons and its expansion would have taken yet more land out of public use. The expansion project would also have infringed on the Kanesatake cemetery. In the years prior to the Oka town council decision, the Kanesata'kehró:non held several peaceful protest marches and made specific requests to halt the project. In March of 1990 when approval seemed imminent, the Kanesata'kehró:non began to occupy a small, seldom used dirt road into the Commons. This occupation continued through the crisis which ended on 26 September, seventy-eights day after it began.
34. "Oral Memory of the Haudenosaunee: Views of the Two Row Wampum," *Northeast Indian Quarterly* 7, No. 1 (Spring 1990); reprinted in *Indian Roots of American Democracy*, ed. José Barreiro (Ithaca: Akwe:kon Press, Cornell University, 1992), 149-159.
35. Hill, "Oral Memory of the Haudenosaunee," 154.
36. Hill, "Oral Memory of the Haudenosaunee," 155.
37. Hill, "Oral Memory of the Haudenosaunee," 159.

