ORIGINS OF IROQUOIS NEUTRALITY:
THE GRAND SETTLEMENT OF 1701

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The early history of Pennsylvania was to a considerable degree shaped by the Five Nations or Iroquois, who had authority over Pennsylvania's Indians. The adoption by the Five Nations of a policy of neutrality between the French and the English frightened the latter and led to the formulation of Pennsylvania's Indian policy. James Logan of Philadelphia, after reading of the Montreal Treaty of 1701, wrote to William Penn, "If we lose the Iroquois we are gone by land." Subsequently Conrad Weiser, as Pennsylvania's Indian ambassador, sought to keep Iroquois neutrality benevolently towards the English. The vicissitudes of Pennsylvania's Indian relations during the eighteenth century are all but unintelligible unless we understand the Grand Settlement of 1701, which Dr. Wallace here explains.—The Editor

IN THE summer of 1701 the Iroquois Confederacy, aware of the fruitlessness of a longer continuance of the beaver wars, and desirous of avoiding further involvement in the skirmishes between the British and the French, made two treaties, almost simultaneously, at Albany and Montreal. These treaties together inaugurated a new era of Iroquois policy, which survived in principle until 1795: a policy of peace toward the "Far Indians," of political manipulation of nearby tribes, and of an armed neutrality between contending Europeans. This policy led to commercial profit and to the seizure of a balance of power between the French and the English. It was a policy which required as much duplicity in diplomatic dealings with the Europeans as the Europeans practiced toward them; their success is measured in the fact that both the English and the French alternated constantly between the conviction that "the Iroquois" were on their own side and the conviction that they had turned to the enemy. In consequence, the basic policy of both French and British toward the Iroquois came to be the securing of Iroquois neutrality. Only secondarily, and occasionally, did either aspire to their full and exclusive alliance; and these aspirations were almost invariably dashed.

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During the last half of the seventeenth century, the Iroquois confederates exerted themselves strenuously to obtain new sources of furs for trade with Europeans. By about 1640 the supply of valued fur-bearing animals, especially beaver, was becoming thin in their own territories; it was necessary to obtain new hunting grounds, or to achieve the role of middlemen between Europeans and Indians to the north and west who could furnish pelts in quantity. The Iroquois lived on the southern edge of the peltry-producing area, just south of the Huron, who with the assistance of the Ottawa were serving as middlemen between the French at Montreal, Quebec, and Three Rivers, and the northern and western Indians. The Iroquois therefore attempted by diplomacy to become partners with the Huron and Ottawa in their trade with the French, and also to divert some of the French-destined furs southward to Albany, on the border of the Iroquois country. Diplomacy failed in both objects, however, and their subsequent piracy of Huron-Ottawa fleets, while it procured them furs, also procured them enemies.

From 1649 to 1670 the Iroquois attempted by war to acquire new beaver hunting grounds and to appropriate to themselves the role of middlemen. Between 1649 and 1656, the Iroquois destroyed in war the Huron, Petun, Neutral and Erie nations, who resided in an arc about the north, east, and south shores of Lake Erie. The survivors of these nations were either forced to flee, or were adopted into Iroquois tribes. Unhappily for the Iroquois, the refugee Huron, Petun, and Ottawa, who had fled to Green Bay and beyond, were still able to collect the furs from the far Indians and still brought the fleets to Montreal. After 1656, the Iroquois, still unable to obtain enough furs for trade, began the piracy of the fur fleets coming to Montreal, blockading the rivers, ambushing the convoys, and seizing the furs. Iroquois raiding parties ranged from Hudson's Bay to the Cumberland River, and from the Susquehanna River to the Mississippi, in search of furs, hunting grounds, and political control of other fur-producing tribes. As rivals of the French, the English at Albany supplied and encouraged the Iroquois; the French, seeking to maintain their lucrative trade with the Huron-Ottawa axis, attacked the Iroquois.

The beaver war more and more became a war between the Huron and Ottawa, who controlled the northern trade, and the
Iroquois, and the Iroquois strangulation of the trade came close to crippling New France. In 1666, however, the French twice invaded the Iroquois country. Peace with France came in 1667. The Iroquois hunting grounds now included the conquered territory north and south of Lake Erie, and in Iroquois opinion much of the Michigan peninsula as well. The Ottawa and Huron, on their part, moved to Michilimackinac, in 1670.1

The situation by 1670 had reached a stalemate. Although the Iroquois were unable by force to expropriate the Huron-Ottawa trade, they were able to extract sufficient beaver from their conquered territories, from hijacking and from a black market in Huron-Ottawa furs, to maintain their own economic balance. The Huron-Ottawa were both aware that peaceful trade with the English, through the Iroquois, would be more profitable than trade with the French periodically interrupted by war with the Iroquois. The French were on the horns of a dilemma: peace between the Iroquois and the Huron-Ottawa might mean a loss of their fur trade; but continued war meant a certain loss of that trade, unless the Iroquois could be destroyed, which appeared to be impossible.

In the decades between 1670 and 1701, therefore, the French policy was one continued desperate effort to prevent an Iroquois-Huron-Ottawa alliance, which would divert the bulk of the northern furs into the Albany market, to the economic advantage of the English and Indians generally; and, correspondingly, the Ottawa and Iroquois policy was to make a mutual peace and economic agreement by which Ottawa furs would go to Albany, whose traders paid higher prices. In 1673, the Iroquois and the Ottawa negotiated a treaty by the terms of which the Iroquois were "to supply the Outaouaes with all the goods they required, and the latter were to carry to them generally all their peltries, and the exchange was to take place on Lake Ontario."2 Frontenac, foreseeing the ruin of New France, undermined the agreement. Although the Ottawa and the Huron, fearful of French power, allowed themselves from time to time in subsequent years to be pushed into attacks on the Iroquois, both tribes dragged their feet in these forays and secretly renewed negotiations. The French

1 See George T. Hunt, The Wars of the Iroquois (Madison, Wis., 1940), for a detailed account of the beaver wars to 1684.
2 Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York, IX, 95: "Journal of Count de Frontenac's Voyage to Lake Ontario in 1673."
themselves were obliged to take the major responsibility for warring on the intransigeant Iroquois. When in 1687 Denonville launched his notorious raid into the Seneca country, the Huron were on the point of joining the Seneca; the Ottawa as a group refused to accompany the French forces, and the few Ottawa who did go along “gave way” during the attack on Tsonontouan. The Ottawa attitude was clearly expressed:

We all are brothers, who ought to form only one body, and possess but one and the same spirit. The French invite us to go to war against the Iroquois; they wish to use us in order to make us their slaves. After we have aided in destroying the enemy, the French will do with us what they do with their cattle, which they put to the plow and make them cultivate the land. Let us leave them to act alone; they will not succeed in defeating the Iroquois; this is the means for being always our own masters.⁵

Denonville succeeded only in burning the Seneca castle; and in 1689 a revenge raid was launched by the Iroquois into the heart of New France, in which 1,500 Iroquois warriors destroyed the village of Lachine near Montreal and “put to the sword all that they encountered in the space of seven leagues” along the river. “The open country was laid waste; the ground was everywhere covered with corpses, and the Iroquois carried away six-score captives, most of whom were burned.” The French were so much impressed that they agreed “these fifteen hundred warriors would have cut to pieces more than six thousand men, if the latter should advance into the mountainous country where the Savages were.”⁴

This stroke of the Iroquois precipitated a “revolt” by the Ottawa and the Huron, who were panic-stricken at their prospective fate.

The Outaouaks informed all the tribes of the devastation that had been inflicted upon the French, and entreated all the chiefs to come to Michilimakinak, that they might consult together upon the measures that ought

⁵ Bacqueville de La Potherie, Histoire de l'Amerique Septentrionale (Paris, 1722), quoted by Emma H. Blair in Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes (Cleveland, 1912), II, 22-24, 52.
⁴ La Potherie, in Blair, op. cit., II, 42-43.
to be taken regarding the wretched condition into which they were going to be plunged. They resolved in their general council to send to Tsonmontouan some deputies, with two of those Iroquois old men whom they had set free, in order to assure the Iroquois that they would have no further connection with the French, and that they desired to maintain with the Iroquois a close alliance.\textsuperscript{5}

A general conspiracy to annihilate the French was concerted, and the French were barely able to maintain the post at Michilimackinac. The French were never able thereafter really to control the Huron and the Ottawa or to prevent them from their alliance with the Iroquois, even though they were able from time to time to push Ottawa war parties into the field. The Michilimackinac Ottawa immediately dispatched a speaker, La Petit Racine, and two chiefs, to the Iroquois, with whom they made the peace that they had planned to make before the attack on Montreal.\textsuperscript{6} Ottawa valor now inclined to attacks on the Osage, Kansas, and Sioux; the French intrigued incessantly and desperately to prevent the disintegration of their Indian alliances. The Ottawa soon were anxious to be friends with the Iroquois for another reason: if the Sioux attacked them, "they could immediately retire with their families among the Iroquois, who would protect them from their enemies."\textsuperscript{7} The Ottawa even planned to invite the Iroquois to join with them in attacking the Illinois and Miami in Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{8}

In 1690 the French, resolved to risk all, threatened that if the tribes did not attack the Iroquois, the French would attack them. Accordingly, some raids were undertaken into the Iroquois country; scalps and prisoners were taken. But all the while secret negotiations were afoot. "An agreement had been made between the Hurons, and the Iroquois that they would on both sides spare the lives of captives they might take."\textsuperscript{9} And the Iroquois sent to the tribes at Michilimackinac eight belts of wampum, along with four belts from English traders proposing a trade alliance and an

\textsuperscript{5}La Potherie, in Blair, II, 44-45.
\textsuperscript{6}Ibid., 41, 95.
\textsuperscript{7}Ibid., 105.
\textsuperscript{8}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., 92.
English post on Lake Erie. The Iroquois belts, sent to the Ottawa, Huron, and others, bore these messages:

By the first, they said that they remembered the peace that they had made with La Petite Racine, and that they had not desired to break it, even though their brothers the Outaouaks should kill them every day; by the second, they buried all the dead whom their brothers had slain. The third hung up a sun at the strait between Lake Herier and Lake Huron, which should mark the boundaries between the two peoples, and this sun should give them light when they were hunting. By the fourth, they threw into the lake, and into the depths of the earth, the blood that had been shed, in order that nothing might be tainted with it, the fifth, they sent “their own bowl,” so that they might have but one dish from which to eat and drink. By the sixth, they promised to eat the “wild beasts” around them which should be common [enemies] to both. The seventh was to make them “eat together of the buffalo,” meaning that they would unite to make war on the Miamis, the Isinois, and other tribes. By the eighth, they were to eat “the white meat,” meaning the flesh of the French.10

The Ottawa “consented to all these demands and sent return messages by means of collars, red-stone calumets, and bales of beaver skins.”11 In fact, the Huron went to the Iroquois, “with calumet ornamented with plumes, and several collars, in order to carry the message of the Outaouaks; the latter asked for full union with the Iroquois, and desired to abandon the side of the French, in order to place themselves under the protection of the English.” (At the same time they sent a deputation to Frontenac, assuring him of their unshakeable attachment. These ambassadors, while on the Ottawa River, did not dare “even to travel in the day time for fear of the Iroquois,” who killed some of them on their way downstream).12

In 1696 the French invaded Iroquoia again, and between 1696 and 1698 the French were able to keep enough Ottawa, Huron, and Miami war parties in the field to seriously inconvenience Iroquois hunting and cost them a considerable number of cas-

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10 Ibid., 95-96.
11 Ibid., 96.
12 Ibid., 106-107.
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By 1698 the Iroquois, unsupported by the British in attacks on the French (the Peace of Ryswick had been signed in 1697) and urged on to peace by the English themselves, prepared to make a peace with the French and their Indians. The French governor was anxious to make an alliance with the Iroquois in order to forestall invasion in case of another war with the English. But after Frontenac’s death, at the end of the year, the Iroquois changed their minds. Iroquois war parties went out again; Ottawa scalped a few Iroquois “qui chassoient au détroit des lacs Herier et Sainte Claire.” Raids and counter raids continued while both French and British diplomats urged the Iroquois to agree to a peace.

Six Iroquois ambassadors (representing each of the Five Nations except the Mohawk, who arrived later) visited Montreal in July, 1700, complaining that peaceable Iroquois hunting parties had been attacked by Ottawa at Detroit, by Illinois on the Ohio, by Miami on the Chouegen. They asked the French to tell their allies to drop the hatchet and asked for an exchange of prisoners. The French accordingly began to arrange for the grand conference to be held next year.

This armistice of 1700 was a grateful respite both for the French and the Iroquois. That winter very large parties of Iroquois went out hunting. The winter was, however, marred by an incident: some Iroquois broke open some beaver cabins in the Ottawa country, and were surprised in the act by the Ottawa. Blood flowed.

About July 21, 1701, the Onondaga, Cayuga, and Oneida ambassadors—along with other Iroquois come to trade in furs—arrived at the rendezvous (the village of the Catholic Iroquois of the Sault, near Montreal). After these, arrived the deputies of the other nations, to the number of seven or eight hundred: Ottawa, Chippewa, Huron, Miami, Winnebago, Fox, Mascouten, Menominee, Potawatomi, Sac... The conference began on the twenty-fifth with a prolonged discussion of the mutual economy of the French tribes. Then in came the Iroquois “d’un grand sang froid.”

The Iroquois succeeded in out-facing the French: they brought

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La Potherie (1722), IV, passim.
no prisoners to be exchanged, as had the Miami and Huron. The French and their allies complained that they had forced their prisoners to go to Montreal to be exchanged. The Iroquois said that they would be glad to set free the Frenchmen prisoners among them, and those of other nations also, if each claimant would send deputies into the Iroquois country. No prisoner of theirs would be forced to go. Besides, said the Iroquois (blandly stretching the point) for four years they had kept the peace, while the other nations attacked them. Days of wrangling followed, the other nations blaming the French for insisting that their allies bring in their prisoners while the Iroquois brought none. At last French face was saved by the Iroquois promising to let their prisoners go.

On August 4 the peace was concluded among the Indians with the official prisoner exchange, the Miami asking the Iroquois to remember, when hunting parties of the two tribes met, that the prisoners were well treated (at that time the bulk of the Miami were resident in Wisconsin and Illinois). This was the occasion also of a grand population re-arrangement among the French Indians, agreed to by the Iroquois: the Huron of St. Joseph were to establish themselves at Detroit, and they and others were to have the privilege of hunting thereabout; the Miami were to assemble on the Miami River.

In a final conference with the French governor, De Callieres, on August 7, the specific understanding between the French and the Iroquois was worked out. The French governor invited Iroquois hunters to trade with the French at Detroit and other posts. In case of a war between the French and the British, the Iroquois were to be neutral. The Iroquois, on their part, remarked, “We thank you for the establishment which you have made at detroit, because when we hunt in those parts, it will be very easy for us to procure what we need. We will be displeased if you reopen the war with the English, because you and they are both our friends, however if that should happen, we would leave you smoking peaceably on your mats [i.e., within your own territory], as you have asked us.”

A few days later, the Mohawk came to Montreal and ratified the proceedings of the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Oneida.18

18 The Montreal treaty is described by La Potherie (1722), Vol. IV (which is devoted entirely to the subject).
While the Iroquois deputies were on their way to Montreal to negotiate the French peace, other Iroquois deputies were concluding a treaty with the English at Albany. The Mohawk delegation to Albany probably were the late arrivals at Montreal. The British were anxious that the Iroquois be at peace with the French (the fur trade languished during wars) but they were also anxious that they remain enemies. Specifically, they were alarmed at news that the Iroquois were allowing the French to build a post and fort at Detroit and that the Iroquois might make an alliance with the French.\(^\text{10}\)

I wonder that I have not heard of that design of the French's and that you are not more zealous to oppose it (vizt) their building a Forte at Tjughsaghrondie als Wawayachtenek the principle pass where all your Beaver hunting is. You must not suffer it by any means. I am inform'd it is your Land and you have won it with the sword at the cost of much blood, and will you lett the French take it from you without one blow. You can never expect to hunt beaver any more in peace if you let them fortifie themselves att that principall pass, if you are minded to secure your posterity from slavery and bondage, hinder it: Remember how they gott Cadarachqui and what a plague that place has been to you ever since.

Itt would seem by proposals I have lately heard were made att Canada that there has been some overtures of trade offer'd, which I can not believe being well assured that there is much better pennyworths here, they never being able to afford their goods soe cheap as wee, I fear its with design to delude you for which in time the brethren may become sufferers.—

I hope you have maturely considered the Govr of Canada's answer to Dekanissore how he puts you of with shams for your blood by him caused to be shed by the Farr Indians, and what frivolous pretences he makes of his agent not being return'd from Ottowawa, and that is all the redress you must expect from him, if you can not see his deceit by all this you must be willfully blind.—

He tells you he will make a Forte att Tjughsaghrondie or Wawayachtenock to supply you with necessaries when

\(^{10}\) Lydekker, 1938, 8-11.
you are a hunting, and to secure you from the Ottawaes, but when the Forte is made then he will command you and your beavers too, Nay you shall never hunt a beaver there without his leave; doe you not remember how the French long ago desired but leave to make a hutt att Cadarachqui for a smith to be there to mend your arms, and when that was granted, they built such a stone Forte, that has since been a prison for your people trapan’d—

But the Iroquois were as able to carry on diplomatic exhortation as the English and replied, in effect, that if the British didn’t like it, they could go out and prevent it themselves.

Brother Corlaer—Wee complain of the French of Canada’s incroaching upon our territories and that they goe and build Forts upon our land without our consent, Wee pray that the great King of England may be acquainted with itt, and that he will be pleased to take care to prevent ittt—doe give ten Beavers. . . . Wee would remove the end of the [covenant] chain to Tiochsaghrondie or wawyachtenok were itt in our power, but the French would mock at itt for they have taken itt in possession already against our wills sending people thither to make a Forte, but wee hope they will be removed speedily. . . .

Wee desire that our Secretary Robt Livingston may be sent to Corachkoo the great King of England to acquaint how that the French of Canada incroach upon our territories by building a Forte att Tjughsaghrondie and to pray that our great King may use all means to prevent itt, else wee shall be tyed upp, wee shall not be able to live, they will come nearer us every day with their Forts; Wee doe give and render up all that land where the Beaver hunting is which wee won with the sword eighty years ago to Coraghkoo our great King and pray that he may be our protector and defender there and desire our secretary may write an instrument which wee will signe and seale, that itt may be carried by him to the King, wee fear if he does not goe, there is soe much business, this will be only read layd aside and forgott, but if he goes wee are sure, wee shall have an answer.

Brother Corlaer—The Governr of Canada has sent a party of men who are gone behind our Country privately

to build a Forte att Tjughsgaghrondie you are desirious to know what wee have done in that case, Your people that have been att Onondage can tell you—Wee thought this Governt would have done something in the matter and to have found you busy in your books and mapps (meaning that the line should be run between the two Governts) wee can doe nothing in that case you know, wee have not power to resist such a Christian enemy, therefore wee must depend upon you Brother Corlaer to take this case in hand and acquaint the great King with it for what will bcome of us att this rate where shall wee hunt a beaver if the French of Canada take possession of our beaver country—.\textsuperscript{35}

The upshot of all these mutual exhortations to strength and virtue was the signing of the famous “Deed from the Five Nations to the King of their Beaver Hunting Ground.” In this treaty, the English agreed to secure the Iroquois in the use of their prime beaver country, a vaguely bounded tract north of Lake Erie and on the Michigan peninsula as far west as the Miami country (at that time the bulk of the Miami were west of Chicago) and as far north as a place called Quadoge (probably meaning Michilimackinac, for Sir William Johnson later testified that they once had claimed by conquest the entire Michigan peninsula).\textsuperscript{19} All of this country they claimed to have won in a war “Fourscore years agoe” from “seaven nations of Indians called the Aragaritka whom by a fair warr we subdued and drove from thence . . . bringing many of them captives to our country and see became the true owners of the Same by conquest. . .”\textsuperscript{20}

The settlement of 1701 represented a diplomatic compromise by the Iroquois. After fifty-two years of almost incessant warfare, during which they had been suffering heavily in casualties, they had been able to bring the French and their Indian allies to an acceptance of a major part of their territorial claims. The Iroquois had failed to conquer the Illinois, the Miami, and the Ottawa confederates at Michilimackinac; by the negotiations with the French and the Ottawa, between 1687 and 1701, it is apparent that the

\textsuperscript{19} Docs. Rel. to Col. Hist. of N. Y., IV, 904-906.
\textsuperscript{26} Docs. Rel. to Col. Hist. of N. Y., IV, 896-911.
Iroquois for practical purposes relinquished pretensions to lands west of the Maumee River and Detroit; their insistence upon hunting west of this line had been the precipitating cause of the wars after 1656. On the other hand, in these negotiations, culminating in the Montreal settlement in 1701, the French and the western Indians recognized Iroquois rights to the lands east of this line.

For the French, the treaty was a compromise too. For fifty years, New France had struggled unsuccessfully to defeat the Iroquois, who continually hampered their commercial welfare and at times threatened to destroy the province itself. Iroquois and French agents competed for the allegiance of the Far Indians, and France was forced, in order to win tactical successes, to adopt an increasingly lofty tone, which further tended to weaken their hold on the Far Indians. To the Ottawa at Michilimackinac, for instance, a Frenchman in 1689 said,

"You Outaouaks are like bears who have been tamed; when one gives them a little freedom, they will no longer recognize those who have reared them. You no longer remember the protection of Onontio, without which you would not possess any country. I am maintaining you in it, and you are living in peace."

Although by vigorous exertions the French were able to coerce and seduce Miami, Ottawa, and other tribes into sporadic attacks on the Iroquois, and were able themselves from time to time to invade the Iroquois country and burn empty villages, they were unable to defeat them in war, and were fast losing an ability to prevent the natural tendency for the Iroquois and the Ottawa to obtain mutual benefit from a trade agreement.

During the years of the beaver wars, the Five Nations had been supported—fitfully and inconsistently—by the English, particularly at Albany. As long as they fought alone against the French and the Far Indians, the Iroquois were glad enough to be the allies of Britain against France. With the settlement of differences with the French and the French Indians, however, an exclusive alliance with the English would be a millstone around Iroquois necks. A better system would be the playing off of French and British

21 Blair, op. cit., II, 40.
against each other, each nation protecting the Iroquois from any intrusion by the other, and leaving the Iroquois free to sell their furs and services, short of war, to the higher bidder. Thus, in regard to the beaver country, in 1701, the French agreed to Iroquois possession of it and agreed not to invade Iroquois lands in case of a war with the English, as long as the Iroquois remained neutral; and at the same time the English contracted to protect this country from intrusion by the French. Indeed, the British contracted to conquer Detroit and the southern Michigan peninsula for the Iroquois to use as a hunting ground. It was a perfect setup: if the French trespassed, the English were committed to help; and the English could be prevented from trespassing by the Iroquois themselves (and so they were). Both French and English, furthermore, would be fearful of offending the Iroquois lest they ally themselves with the other side.

The French in particular were thankful that the Iroquois war was at last over. "It is a strange thing," wrote La Potherie, "that three or four thousand souls can make tremble a whole new world. New England is very fortunate in being able to stay in their good graces. New France is often desolated by their wars, and they are feared through a space of more than fifteen hundred leagues of the country of our allies."

La Potherie, Histoire de l'Amerique Septentrionale (1722), IV, 147.