

**Rebellious Chiefs and the Operation of the Department of Indian Affairs in Ahkwesáhsne
from 1880-1899**

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A Thesis
in the
Department of History

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (History) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Québec, Canada

October 2022

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
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Abstract
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Yasmin Hother Yishay

During an election of chiefs in the summer of 1899, Indian Agent George Long was locked until evening in the schoolhouse where the polls were stationed by the bandmembers of the St. Regis reserve. The event was not a random coincidence, but an organized protest by the people of the community, whose relationship with the agent had grown increasingly hostile since he was stationed at the reserve in 1887. Elections for chiefs were an ongoing issue in St. Regis (known today as Ahkwesáhsne) ever since the implementation of the electoral system imposed by the *Indian Act* of 1876. The current research investigates the operation of the Department of Indian Affairs in Ahkwesáhsne during a twenty-year period, from 1880 to 1900, a decisive period for the bureaucratic and administrative formation of the Department. Through a reading of the agent's letterbooks, and other archival materials, this research provides a micro historical lens into the operation of four different agents stationed at the St. Regis agency. The thesis focuses on the agents' management of the reserve and their implementation of election. It aims to show how the agents acted in self-interest, and that their authoritative supervision produced hostile relations with the band. This research tells not only the story of state formation and the professionalization of government employees, but it also reveals the collective activism and resistance with which the Department and its agents were met.

Acknowledgements

I did not realize, when beginning this research, that I was one of so few individuals who have read the letterbooks of St. Regis, or any letterbooks from the RG10. The collection is so vast and endless, yet it remains dormant and unseen. The answers we seek are right there between the pages; this history is just waiting for someone to come along and read.

It is a strange feeling, to unveil administrative memory that was hoped to be forgotten. My imagination helped me sort through the writing; I could see so clearly the little shack where the agency was stationed, the mud-covered leather boots worn by the agents. Their loneliness and isolation; the ink smudged fingertips and smell of tobacco and wood smoke. When the handwriting changed the story did too. New characters were introduced, women's silent presence, their bubbly handwriting giving them away. And while the agents came and went the DIA remained hateful, discriminatory and unchanged.

At one point I was dreaming of the chiefs. They would visit my dreams, unlike the agents. I hope I did their lives and story justice. They were rascals and heroes, after all.

I would not be so passionate, dedicated and knee high in this topic were it not for Dr. Gavin Taylor, who has been a mentor and most amazing teacher since my undergrad years at Concordia many moons ago. His classes switched a light that suddenly illuminated the world, with centuries old imperialism at its core. I am beyond grateful for his years of teaching and his most dedicated help as my advisor for this project.

I would also like to acknowledge my co-supervisor Dr. Bimadoshka Pucan for her help and especially for introducing me to the archives.

Without Thomas Hughes these pages would be most unbearable. His thorough editing is beyond commendable, and his careful listening about my obsession with Agent Long helped me sleep at night.

Thank you also for my beloved friend Adriana Mogosanu who stood by me for these past two years and spent countless hours discussing this research with me, mulling over this hidden history.

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Introduction

In a newspaper article published in *The Globe* on March 28, 1899 titled “An Indian Riot: Trouble on the St. Regis and Cornwall Island Reserve” a familiar tale was reported. The article reports on a “riot” that had taken place the day before, in which “200 aborigines” had surrounded the grounds where an election was scheduled to take place and badly assaulted the police on site and the Indian Agent stationed at the reserve agency.¹ St. Regis, as the community of Ahkwesáhsne was called at the time, had become a frequent headline item in newspapers that covered the community’s ongoing resistance to the Canadian government. The reserve had been the centre of activity for some time and provided constant newsworthy stories to tell. A Kanien’kehá:ka community, known for its rebellious spirit and steadfast opposition to authorities, that by the end of the nineteenth century St. Regis had become one of the most troubling Indian reserves to the Department of Indian Affairs. Ahkwesáhsne was, and remains, a unique case for the study of Indigenous sovereignty due to its historical ties to the pan-Indian movement and its participation and role in the broader political body of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Furthermore, the reserve is unique because of its placement within several colonial jurisdictions, both national and provincial. It is an Indigenous reserve that geographically and socially highlights the issues voiced by the Indigenous sovereignty movement and the contradictions implicit in the very notion of First Nations peoples in the context of a settler colonial debate.

¹ Special Correspondent to *The Globe*, “An Indian Riot: Trouble on the St. Regis and Cornwall Island Reserve” *The Globe*, March 28, 1899. <https://www-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/docview/1649958533/EBF9885EF1094A0BPQ/6?accountid=10246> (Accessed Sep. 4. 2022)

The late decades of the nineteenth century were monumental historical periods in the history of Canada. The post-Confederation period necessitated an array of significant changes to the Canadian state, and primarily the bureaucratization of its state institutions. The federal government developed in this period into the bureaucratic infrastructure of today; from its judicial and legal institutions, political parties and organizational bodies. Indispensable to this post-Confederation growth was the creation of the Department of Indian Affairs, the governmental body made to manage Indigenous peoples across Dominion territories. The DIA's² treatment of Indigenous peoples marked a dramatic change from the diplomatic and trade relationship between the colonial powers and First Nations in prior centuries. No longer seen as useful allies in times of war, or beneficial trading partners: by the nineteenth century, First Nations peoples were regarded by the colonial state as a "problem" to be dealt with. A problem of people separated from the settler population and culture; a demographic residing in desirable lands, who were seen as "uncivilized" and unable to govern for themselves.

The post-Confederation period, and specifically the last two decades of the nineteenth century (in which this research focuses) is immensely important for several reasons. The first, is that it was a period of the administrative and bureaucratic development of the DIA. An era in which the Department became an increasingly powerful body in the federal Government and shaped the relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples for decades to come. Furthermore, this period of administrative formation includes the development of the professionalization of its employees, politicians and bureaucrats. It was a significant period that set the foundation for the management of Indigenous peoples; a foundation based on a discriminatory ideology that was executed through oppressive and authoritative state control.

² DIA is an acronym for the Department of Indian Affairs, and I use it extensively throughout this thesis.

Secondly, this period of governmental materialization was also a period that entails the budding formation of a resistance movement of Indigenous peoples, and specifically of the people of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Haudenosaunee's resistance to the federal government amalgamated as a nationalist sovereignty movement in the 1920s, and played a central role in the Pan-Indianism movement in North America.³ However, it is between the 1880 and 1900 that this formation of collective resistance begins to take shape, laying the foundation for the movement of resistance of and sovereignty of the twentieth century.

This research dissertation is an investigation into the budding period of DIA administration and the resistance of Indigenous peoples that formed as a response. More specifically, it is a micro-history of the operation of the Department at Ahkwesáhsne between 1800 to 1899. This work looks into the relationship between the St. Regis Band and the Indian agents stationed at the agency and assess the agent's implementation of elections of chiefs. The elections were made obligatory by the Canadian state in the *Indian Act* of 1876, and were imposed with the aim of replacing the traditional governing systems that First Nations practiced for generations. While my initial interest in this research was to focus on the bureaucratic history of the DIA and the operation of its agents in an Indian reserve, it became apparent that such a topic was far too broad. The agents were responsible for an array of issues on the reserves and focusing on them all would have been too ambitious for a graduate research. I therefore decided to focus on elections as a particular regulation of the *Indian Act*. I analyzed the agents' implementation of the elections and focused my research on how the community's reaction to the

³ See the work of Allan Downey for the history of Haudenosaunee nationalism in the early twentieth century: Downey, Allan. *The Creator's Game: Lacrosse, Identity, and Indigenous Nationhood*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018) as well as the work of Laurence Hauptman on the creation of the Haudenosaunee passports and the leadership of Chief Deskaheh: Laurence M. Hauptman. *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership: The Six Nations Since 1800. River* (Syracuse: NY. Syracuse University Press. 2008).

elections had changed over time. While immersed in the research it became clear to me that the elections were a central issue that was very important for the community. Furthermore, it was the instigating nucleus in which the resistance and sovereignty movement grew from, and one of the most contested clauses of the *Indian Act* by the Haudenosaunee and Mohawk people.

The history of Haudenosaunee and Mohawk sovereignty, activism and resistance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is well researched. Leading in this field of history are Kanienkeha:ka scholars such as Audra Simpson and Susan Hill and non-Indigenous scholars such as Laurence M. Hauptman,⁴. In her work *Mohawk Interruptus*,⁵ Audra Simpson challenges the academic field of Native studies in anthropology, while highlighting the legitimization of Mohawk nationhood and sovereignty. She presents Mohawk nationalism as a prevailing political practice and a longstanding ideology embedded in the contemporary history of the Mohawk nation. It is within her writing that I found my topic of interest, of uncovering the history of Mohawk resistance in the nineteenth century.⁶ Her work argues that Mohawk nationalism challenges the settler colonial worldview, by demonstrating how a sovereign entity can exist within another state. Laurence M. Hauptman is an historian that specializes in Haudenosaunee history, specifically on the Seneca and Oneida nations. His work on Haudenosaunee leadership and resistance from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries is one of the few histories written on the

⁴ Susan Hill is a Haudenosaunee historian whose recent work *The Clay We Are Made Of* is a comprehensive history of the Haudenosaunee people from precontact to post-colonial eras, with a focus on the Six Nation reserve and the Haldimand Track land tenures. While her work does not specifically cover the nationalist movement of the twentieth century it is non-the-less foundational for the contextual research of this topic. See Susan Hill. *The Clay We Are Made Of* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press. 2017).

⁵ Audra Simpson. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁶ In *Mohawk Interruptus* page, 136, there is a passage that sparked my interest: “These resistances to, and struggles with, state forms were not limited to a few periods and places. They had also been felt in Kahnawà:ke in 1884, with petitions against the Canadian Indian Advancement Act of 1884; in Ahkwesáhsne in 1899, when the traditional chief Jake Fire was shot and killed by Royal Canadian Mounted Police for demanding their removal from the community in respect for traditional Mohawk governance (Mitchell 1988, 118); then at Six Nations, for the imposition of an electoral band council in 1924; and the American side of Ahkwesáhsne in 1924, with the United States’ Indian Citizenship Act.”

topic.⁷ In *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership*, Hauptman writes on the history of the Haudenosaunee sovereignty movement in the interwar period. He also has written a variety of work on Haudenosaunee activism in the post war period and also published biographical work on important Haudenosaunee leaders such as Chief Deskaheh and Chief Chapman.

While there are many renown researchers and historians who write about Haudenosaunee's history of activism, leadership and sovereignty, there are three authors in which my work directly corresponds to. Thomas Stone, Dan Rueck and Gerald F. Reid are historians who research the history of the Canadian government's relationship to Kahnwá:ke and Ahkwesáhsne in the post-Confederation period. In his work,⁸ Rueck shows how the DIA tried to undermine the leaders in the community and gain control over their resources, lands and internal affairs. His analysis illustrates that due to strong traditional leadership in the reserve, the Mohawks of Kahnwá:ke were successful in resisting the Canadian state by collectively mobilizing against the Department. Gerald F. Reid also studied the Mohawks of Kahnwá:ke, and more specifically, Reid focused on the factionalism and government formation in Kahnwá:ke during a parallel time period of my own research. In his work⁹ he suggests a pattern similar to my findings. He shows that in the period following the *Indian Act* and imposition of elections, there was division in the band between members who supported traditional governance and others who supported elections and the program of enfranchisement. While Reid's work was a fundamental research for me to draw from, it focuses on Kahnwá:ke and although the communities show a similarity in their response to the election of chiefs, they do not entirely

⁷ Laurence M. Hauptman. *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership*.

⁸ Daniel Rueck. "Commons, Enclosures and Resistance in Kahnawá:ke Mohawk Territory 1850-1900." In *Canadian Historical Review* 95:3 (September 2014) 352-381.

⁹ Gerald F. Reid. *Kahnawà:ke : Factionalism, Traditionalism, and Nationalism in a Mohawk Community* (University of Nebraska Press. 2004).

parallel one another. His work shows how Kahnwá:ke had its own inter-community struggles over land ownership, resources and leadership, and a different relationship with the agents stationed at the reserve.

Thomas Stone's work focuses on St. Regis during the same period as I, yet he has a different interpretation of St. Regis. Stone analyzes cases of community disputes taken to the agents, claiming that such cases "shed a light between the mobilization of external authority and the penetration of indigenous communities by external legal systems".¹⁰ He claims that the DIA was favoured by members of the community who preferred the elective council, and that the tensions experienced within the community at this time show an "impairment of effective intra-community authority".¹¹ He asserts that it was members of the community who involved the DIA in their disputes and other affairs and that the community came to depend on the involvement of the DIA. However, I have a different approach on this issue of intra-community instability during this period. Stone's analysis misses the relationship of the agents with the majority of the community. While he claims that the community regarded the DIA as objective mediators, my assessment of the topic is that the agents were not at all objective, and that these tensions within the community were of the agent's design. In my assessment the community was well aware of the agents' incentives and self-serving motives. Furthermore, I believe that it was the participation of the agents in the community's disputes that would increase these tensions over time, especially regarding the elections and the agents influence and authority over the band council and elected chiefs. Stone in his research also dismissed the hostilities between the agents

¹⁰ Thomas Stone. "Legal Mobilization and Legal Penetration: The Department of Indian Affairs and the Canadian Party at St. Regis, 1876-1918" in *Ethnohistory* 22:4 (1975) 375.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 392.

and the band, and the collective comradery that developed and mobilized the community against the agent and the Canadian government.

Another scholar immensely important to my research is Darren Bonaparte, a Ahkwesáhsne local historian. Bonaparte spent his entire career writing and researching about Ahkwesáhsne, where he was born and raised, and continues to live on today. His research, while not published through an academic institution or within the academic sphere, is rich in detail of traditional and linguistic knowledge missing from academic literature. Bonaparte is a local historian that weaves archival research with oral and traditional histories of the community, and it is in his work in which I found information often missing from either government records or other academics' work. His work shows the importance of local, First Nations historians who write about their own communities and nations and perhaps appreciate and can understand their histories much better than any outsider could.

This thesis is positioned between two intersecting topics; the resistance and activism of Indigenous peoples, and the operation of the DIA and its agents. Haudenosaunee history is well researched. However, the Department's bureaucratic history is understudied, especially regarding their agents' operations in reserves. Perhaps one of the first to study the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs and the antagonist actors responsible for the policies of the *Indian Act* and the Department's racist rhetoric is Brian Titley. His book *A Narrow Vision*¹² was the first comprehensive study of the DIA and Duncan Campbell Scott who led the Department for a period of nearly 25 years. Scott's reign as the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs had a tremendous influence upon the ways in which the federal Government dealt with and

¹² Brian Titley. *A Narrow Vision* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986) 2-203, as well as *The Indian Commissioners: Agents of the State and Indian Policy in Canada's Prairie West, 1873-1932*. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2009)

conceptualized relations with Indigenous peoples. Titley's work inspired many scholars¹³ who have since studied the history of the department and its genocidal rhetoric. His work on the DIA was a guideline for me to navigate the administrative and bureaucratic mechanism of the Department. Furthermore, his work shaped my understanding of the internal systems of the Department and its operational procedures, from the headquarter in Ottawa to reserve agencies. Titley's work focuses on the period in which Duncan Campbell Scott was the head of the Department, which was a time period that preceded the eras I researched. His work, however, provides an extensive overview of the Department's history prior to Scott's reign.

Many scholars have written on the discriminatory, violent and racist policies of assimilation and the *Indian Act*, and the ways in which it continues to impact First Nations people in Canada today.¹⁴ There are scholars such as Dean Neu and Cameron Graham, who continued Titley's discussion on the bureaucratic history of the Department. Their publication "Accounting and the Holocaust of Modernity"¹⁵ examines the Department's rhetoric and ideology through an economic lens. The authors analyze the accounting and administrative methods of the Department, revealing the ideological narrative that guided bureaucrats and policy makers in the DIA, from the post Confederations period to the end of Scott's reign in

¹³ In their most recent article "Accounting and the Holocausts of Modernity" Dean Neu and Cameron Graham had credited Titley numerous times for laying down the foundation of the history of the DIA, they also referenced him several times throughout the article. Robin Jarvis Brownlie also cites him extensively in his work.

¹⁴ See the work of John Lutz in *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), Sidney L. Haring *White Man's Law: Native People in Nineteenth-Century Canadian Jurisprudence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), Bonita Lawrence "Gender, Race and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview." *Hypatia* Vol. 8. No. 2. (May 2003) 3-31, Arthur Manuel Grand Chief Ronald M. Derrickson, forward by Naomi Klein. *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake Up Call* (Toronto: Between the Lines Publishing, 2015), Adele Perry *Aqueduct: Colonialism, Resources, and the Histories We Remember* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2016) & *Structures of Indifference: An Indigenous Life and Death in a Canadian City* (Winnipeg: Manitoba University Press, 2018). See also White, Louellyn. *Free to be Mohawk: Indigenous Education at the Akwesasne Freedom School*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2015). These are just a few of the outstanding academic work on the discriminatory history and policies of the American and Canadian governments but there are many more.

¹⁵ Dean Neu and Cameron Graham. "Accounting and the Holocausts of Modernity".in *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* Vol. 17 Issue 4. (September, 2004) 578-603.

1940. Yet, their work looks at the Department on a larger scale and does not specify on the agent's roles in the Department's accounting activities in individual reserves. The most relevant and instrumental academic work to my research is by historian Robin Jarvis Brownlie, who wrote an imperative study on the operation of Indian agents.¹⁶ Brownlie's work was fundamental to my research, not only in shaping my analysis but also in providing extensive research on the operation of the DIA on reserves. In *A Fatherly Eye* Brownlie provides an historical analysis on Indian agents stationed in two reserves in Ontario. His work is one of the few academic publications in Canada that describe the work of agents on reserves and details Indigenous peoples' resistance to the agents. However, *A Fatherly Eye* discusses the interwar period, during Duncan Campbell Scott's leadership, and is a time period later than the one I researched. By the interwar period the Department had established its bureaucratic apparatus, as opposed to the 1880 to 1900 in which the organization was at its burgeoning stages.

The majority of the primary sources in which this research is drawn is from the Library Archives Canada RG10 and RG2 collections. The RG10 is the Department of Indian Affairs archival collection. It is rich in documentation from maps, official correspondence, and an array of data collected by the Department for over a 200-year period. The central characters in the heart of this research are the agents stationed at St. Regis from 1800 to 1899, and therefore the majority of this research is based on the handwritten accounts of their work and lives while stationed as agents in the St. Regis agency. These accounts are amassed in collections of letters called letterbooks. The letterbooks were copied records of all correspondence written by the agents to their supervisors in Ottawa, or other personnel they may have been in touch with, such as civilians or local officials. The agents were expected to write daily letters to their superiors

¹⁶ Brownlie, Robin Jarvis. *"A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario 1918-1930"* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2003)

reporting the ordinary affairs in the reserve, as well as record any accounting activities of the band fund. The letterbooks, while being official documentation were also very personal, and provide a lens into the lives of the agents, their opinions, feelings and beliefs. They also providing a perspective on the people of Ahkwesáhsne, from the point of view of the agents. The letterbooks are the main primary sources in which this research is based on, and during this research I have read nearly 2,000 pages from the letterbooks. These pages include letters and correspondence, contracts, data entries of surveys conducted by the agents, petitions of the band transcribed by the agents and administrative publications such as Department manuals, advertisements, and other memorandums.

The RG2 in the LAC is the Privy Council collection. From there I drew many primary sources, such as petitions, depositions of chiefs, department debates, approval for arrests and other information. But primarily, from the RG2 I collected petitions written by the people of Ahkwesáhsne. I have been able to locate about a dozen petitions in the RG2 collection and these petitions are fundamental to my research. They are the sole archival documentation available that were written by the Kanien'kehá:ka of Ahkwesáhsne, and other communities, during the period of which I researched. Other sources included in this research are newspaper articles from various newspaper publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Globe*. Finally, I also regarded official documentations from the Department, such as maps, contracts, official correspondence, and annual reports about the various reserves throughout Canada.

Ahkwesáhsne is a unique community due to its transborder territory. As the reserve is divided by two national jurisdictions, there are information and archival materials available in both sides of the border. My researched focused on the Canadian side of the reserve, and

therefore I looked at and focused on Canadian sources, rather than archival materials from New York State, and the United State National Archives. While both nations have many similarities in the way they managed and handled Indigenous peoples and Indigenous land, there are undoubtedly differences in their bureaucratic histories. My primary intentions in this research was to research the bureaucratic history of the government of Canada, and there for I focused and engaged with Canadian sources.

The methodologies I am using in my work and research of this history is first and foremost informed by contemporary First Nations thinkers who have radicalized this field of study. Two authors at the heart of my assessment of this academic research are Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, and more specifically their famous essay published in 2014 “Decolonialization is not a Metaphor”.¹⁷ In this radical paper the two provide a critique of the term decolonialize, which they claim had become a hip term in academic circles. Tuck and Yang assert that the discourse of decolonizing used by popular culture, educational advocacy and scholarship has turned decolonization into a metaphor that they see as harmful and unsettling. They remind their readers that decolonialization is a complex process that entails “repatriation of Indigenous land and life” and that the decolonial desires, which they call “settler moves to innocence” of non-natives can “further settler colonialism”.¹⁸ Tuck and Yang are not the only scholars that critique settler scholarship on Indigenous issues and histories. The work of Glenn Sean Coulthard in *Red Skin White Masks*¹⁹ also provides a framework that rejects colonial politics of recognition. Coulthard applies Franz Fanon’s master/slave narrative to the relationship between the Canadian

¹⁷ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*, 1 (2012): 1-40.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁹ Glenn Sean Coulthard. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. (University of Oklahoma Press, 1998)

state and First Nations peoples. He claims that colonial relations of power are produced and maintained in contemporary policies of recognition and decolonialization. He argues that the process of recognition of First Nations by the federal government, is in itself a settler colonial system which sets its own guidelines, framework and limitations of any Indigenous affairs. Policies regarding self-determination, resource extraction or Indigenous education, are therefore a perpetuation of the colonial project. Audra Simpson as well has criticized the settler academic and political spheres that for centuries used Indigenous peoples as academic subjects. Similarly to Coulthard, Simpson criticizes the political culture of recognition and claims that the politics of refusal to be settlers or confine to settle culture or citizenship is an important part of the Mohawk's ongoing resistance to colonialism.

The issues raised by Indigenous scholars such as Tuck, Yang, Simpson and Coulthard regarding decolonialization, liberal politics of recognitions, and the way in which settler people have studied and appropriated Indigenous cultures, are important concerns to me. As a settler individual who whole heartedly supports First Nations goals for sovereignty and repatriation of lands and resources, I have to be careful of how I attend to this subject I am researching. I continuously question how my research can benefit Indigenous peoples and how it may contribute to a discourse that does not perpetuate this metaphor critiqued by Tuck and Yang, and challenged by Simpson and Coulthard. A fundamental issue and question I keep constant in the background of my research is, what is my role as a researcher and how can I remain an ally to the peoples whose histories I am studying? The voices of the scholars mentioned above are fundamental in understanding this history, for it is a history of the way in which the Kanien'kehá:ka of Ahkwesáhsne resisted the federal government and asserted their sovereignty and steadfast desire to govern themselves and manage their own affairs. This research is a history

dissertation that aims to show how Haudenosaunee nationalism and sovereignty movements are rooted in a longstanding history that parallels the history of Canada's state formation. My interest in this topic of state formation and its relationship to First Nations people developed during my undergraduate degree. While studying the history of Canada it became apparent that I was entirely clueless about First Nations peoples and their histories, and thus began a journey for me into understanding this dark colonial past. I am a person involved in social causes my entire adult life and felt that using the academy to do research regarding state injustice is crucial.

Finally, the following chapters reveal an understudied history of the federal government. While there is, undoubtedly, an array of historiographical studies regarding the injustices perpetrated by the Canadian government towards Indigenous peoples, there lacks research that details the federal government's operation on reserves. This bureaucratic history is important, and the findings can be staggering and detrimental in revealing secrets long hidden by the Canadian state. The operation of the agents on reserves and the guidance of their superiors in Ottawa first and foremost shows a history of federal administrative development which is compounded by heinous ideologies, that regarded Indigenous peoples as a problem to be ridden of. Yet the tale told in the following pages shows how state oppression and violence was met with by a movement of resistance and an uttermost objection to be assimilated, managed, and suppressed.

Chapter 1

“The Land Where the Partridge Drums”

Ahkwesáhsne

Ahkwesáhsne, known in the nineteenth century as St. Regis, is a Mohawk, or Kanien'kehá:ka²⁰ reserve located on the banks of the St. Lawrence river west of Montreal and east of Cornwall, at the intersection of two provincial lines and the national border of the United States and Canada. The reserve was created as a mission by French Jesuit missionaries in 1755 who assembled together a handful of families from the nearby Kanien'kehá:ka settlement of Kahnawake. It is unique in that it encompasses a territory of islands in the St. Lawrence river and inland territory south of the riverbank that is divided by the 45th parallel line which acts as a national border agreed on in the 1783 Treaty of Paris following the American Revolutionary War. The Kanien'kehá:ka community of St. Regis existed in that location prior to the American Revolutionary War and the Treaty of Paris, and so it was divided by the national border half a century after its creation. The community is thus divided into five unique jurisdictions; that of two provinces, one state and two countries. The reserve, on the Canadian side is divided into two parts, one east of Yellow Island and within the Quebec border, known as reserve No.15, and one west of St. Regis Island on the Ontario side, called Reserve No.59. The majority of the reserve territory is located inland, south of the of the St. Lawrence, on the American side of the border.

In the 18th century when the settlement was created, it encompassed numerous islands throughout the St. Lawrence, and was scattered over the various islands and land south of the St. Lawrence. Ahkwesáhsne, in Kanien'kehá means “Land Where the Partridge Drums” and the area

²⁰ For the rest of the text I will use the term Kanien'kehá:ka, not Mohawk, to designate the people of St. Regis and the Mohawk nation.

was historically a rich hunting ground for the Kanien'kehá:ka people, and other First Nations peoples that inhabited this region of the St. Lawrence River Valley prior to and after the arrival of the Europeans. Due to its diverse geographical landscape of marshes, riverbends and forests, the area has a rich array of wildlife. The unique geography of the area, where the St. Lawrence river narrows and the heavy currents are slowed by numerous islands large and small, and the confluence of four rivers (St. Regis River, Salmon River, Raquette River and Grass River) makes navigation by water relatively calm for fishing and makes hunting grounds easily accessible.

Ahkwesáhsne, with its unique geographical and territorial placement, exemplifies the complicated and at times advantageous political relations of the Kanien'kehá:ka, who since the arrival of the Europeans, were in the midst of conflicting political and economic alliances with the various European nations attempting to colonize the region, and within their own political relationships with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and other First Nations. This community represents a unique historical case because of its geographical location that places it in the midst of two national jurisdictions of the United States and Canada. While the majority of this research relates to the Canadian side of the band and the administration of the band by Canadian officials, the American side of the reserve and its members are frequently mentioned in the letterbooks of the Canadian agents. Following the War of 1812, the reserve was officially split into two, and the American side had its own band council, schools, churches and elective system. However, the two communities remained connected, and members would often intermarry, or lived and laboured on either side of the border. The agents distinguished between the two sides of the community by labeling the members as "Canadian Indians" or "American Indians". While disputes arrived between the two communities throughout the period of my research, most of

these disputes were solved internally between the two councils, and the impression left is one of unity and commonality, rather than a divided community.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy & the People of the Flint

The people of the Longhouse, named by the Europeans as Iroquois or, by their own dialects, the Haudenosaunee, were peoples who inhabited the land of northeastern North America since time immemorial. The territories of the Haudenosaunee lands encompassed a large area, from the Great Lakes region on the western shores of Lake Ontario, to present day New York State's Hudson River to the Genesee River and northward into the St. Lawrence River valley. Haudenosaunee Confederacy prior to European contact consisted of five nations; the Kanien'kehá:ka, which translates to the People of the Flint, at its most eastern frontier, followed westward by the Onyota'a:ka (Oneida), Onönda'gaga (Onondaga), Gayogohó:no' (Cayuga) and Onödowá'ga: (Seneca). The five nations shared common social structures, culture, dialects and ancestry, and were tied to one another through an extensive network of kinship based on a matrilineal clan system that connected households to communities, communities to nations and nations into a confederacy that acted as an economic, political and spiritual alliance.

The Haudenosaunee inhabited a vast geographical landscape, and the ancestral origin of their peoples is traced to a linguistic family known as Iroquoian.²¹ Haudenosaunee social

²¹In the Haudenosaunee oral tradition, the story of their people begins with Sky Woman, who was a daughter of the coupling of a man and a woman in the Sky World. Sky Woman married a man, who in a range of jealousy pushes her down a deep hole in the ground, from a tree which he pulled out and unrooted. Sky Woman fell into a watery world inhabited by animals who helped her as she fell. She landed safely on a back of a turtle, where vegetation sprung to life and thus the world was created. Each nation holds their own particular version of this origin story, but all essentially detail this cosmological creation of life which begins with Sky Woman and her landing on the turtle. The story of Sky Woman lays at the heart of Haudenosaunee social structure that consists of a complex weaving of kinship networks determined by matrilineal ancestry. For more on the origins story of the Haudenosaunee see Mohawk, John. *Thoughts of Peace: The Great Law. Pp:240-248 in Thinking Indian A John Mohawk Reader.* (Fulcrum Publishing, Golden Colorado, 2010) also Fenton, William N. *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1998).

structure consists of a complex weaving of kinship networks determined by matrilineal ancestry. This extensive network of kinship ties consists of numerous clans. Each clan represents a female ancestor and has a matriarch who acts as a leader of the clan. The number of clans varies from one nation to another. The Kanien'kehá:ka, for example, have three distinct clans, (Turtle, Bear and Wolf Clans) while the Oneida are divided into nine clans. The clans are represented by animals and are divided into the elements of water, land and air.²² According to the Haudenosaunee, each member of a clan is considered a relative, regardless of which nation they belong to. The clan title and family names are passed from mother to her children, as the ancestral lineage follows the bloodline of the mother. Matrilineal lineage was fundamental to Haudenosaunee social organization, and of ultimately villages and communities. The clan system is the political and social backbone of Haudenosaunee societies, from ancient time to the modern eras.

According to Haudenosaunee tradition, the Confederacy was created by “The Peacemaker” who sought to bring an end to the conflicts and war between the five nations.²³ The Peacemaker presented the nations with the Great Law of Peace, which would ensure peace among their peoples through the creation of a governing system that functioned through kinship and reciprocity. Each nation was given a role within the confederacy; the Kanien'kehá:ka were given the role of the Keepers of fire in the Eastern Door; Seneca were the Keepers of the Western Door, and in the heart of the Confederacy, the central fire was kept by the Onondaga,

²²A clan is not limited to one animal, and within one clan there could be a fragmentation of various different types of animals or birds. See “Clan System”. Haudenosaunee Confederacy Website. Accessed on May 5th, 2022. <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/clan-system/>

²³The story of the Peace Maker and the origin of the Five Nation confederacy, is an important oral tradition that continues to be told today throughout the various communities and nations of the Confederacy. In the long epic of this oral tradition, the Peacemaker was mysteriously conceived from a young girl who was living in isolation with her mother, who was visited in her dream by a man who foretold her the prophecy of the newly born child. The child grew up fast and, in his youth, begun a journey unifying the Five Nations. His journey was extensive and long, and through the aid of a man called Hiawatha, the Peacemaker spread his news of peace throughout the various clans and villages.

with the Oneidas and Cayugas playing the role of the younger brothers. Each nation, represented by their clans, would forever appoint a line of hereditary chief to govern, protect, and attend the Grand Council. The chiefs were chosen by the clan mothers and were assigned for life. A great white wampum belt (*skanodahkerahkawah*) was woven to symbolize the coming together of the Five Nations, which joined together to “work and carry out the principles of the Great Peace” (*kayahnerenhkawah*).²⁴

While the date of the creation of the Confederacy has been debated by scholars, the Confederacy dates its creation long before the arrival of the Europeans on Turtle Island, and early colonial accounts detail the political union of the Haudenosaunee.²⁵ The first well-known documented encounter with the Europeans, who landed on the shores of the St. Lawrence, was in 1609. The Kanien’kehá:ka were defeated by a French-Algonquian force led by Samuel de Champlain at Ticonderoga. While the early eras of European relations with the Kanien’kehá:ka were marked by warfare, they were primarily relations of trade and political alliances. Being the most eastern nation of the Confederacy, the Kanien’kehá:ka traded and created political alliances with the Dutch, English and French throughout the 17th to 19th centuries. The Kanien’kehá:ka were an essential political body for the Europeans, and their alliances would shift and change throughout the colonial periods, at times isolating them from their alliance and relationships with the Confederacy.

Sickness, War and Relocation

²⁴ Parker, Arthur C. “The traditional Narrative of the Origin of the Confederation of the Five Nations” Page 98 in *The Constitution of the Five Nations or the Iroquois Book of the Great Law*. (IROQRAFTS Ltd., Ohsweken, Ontario: 1984)

²⁵ Fenton. *The Great Law*. 69.

The first two centuries following the arrival of the Europeans in the eastern coast of North America, were, for the Haudenosaunee, heavily marked by wars. As one of the earliest trading partners with Europeans, the Kanien'kehá:ka, along with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, sought to control trade and trading routes as European goods became increasingly valuable, and the number of European settlements and trading posts dramatically increased.²⁶ Throughout the seventeenth century, the Kanien'kehá:ka and the Haudenosaunee were in continuous war with neighbouring nations. From the northern nations of the Algonquins and the Huron Confederacy, the Mahicans and as far east as far as Mi'kmaq territory in the Maritimes and other nations south towards presentday South Carolina.²⁷ Epidemics ravaged their populations. By 1650, Kanien'kehá:ka communities in the Mohawk Valley region had lost more than fifty percent of their population to smallpox and other diseases brought by the Europeans.²⁸ Population loss caused by disease intensified captive wars with other First Nations as well as traditional mourning wars. This century-long conflict is also known as the Beaver Wars. It ended with the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701.

The Kanien'kehá:ka's largest communities were situated to the west of the Hudson river, near present-day Albany, which was a Dutch trading port called Fort Orange. Their position with the Dutch was advantageous. However, by 1664 the English had ceded New Netherlands, and

²⁶ This is a broad summarization of a broadly accepted hypothesis regarding the Beaver Wars. Historians such as Jose Brendão and George T. Hunt that stress the importance to the Haudenosaunee of acquiring captives rather than simply a trading monopoly.

²⁷ There is a vast literature on this period of warfare, trade and pandemics. One of the leading scholars on this history is Richard White, author of the influential work *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*. In his work White shows that this period of colonialism stretching from 1600-1800 was an ongoing process of mutual accommodation between the Natives and the Europeans. He coins this space as a "middle ground" which consisted of mutual understanding between the two groups, and a collaborative effort which established a type of market economy. Other critical work on this topic includes Denys Delage *Bitter Feast* and Gilles Havard's work on Native and colonial diplomacy, *The Great Peace of Montreal 1701*.

²⁸ Richter, Daniel K. *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The People of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization*. (Williamsburg: Virginia. The University of North Carolina Press, 1992) 59, Richter goes on to explain that "by the early 1640s these plagues had more than halved the population of the Five Nations, to approximately ten thousand; Mohawk population alone may have plunged by as much as 75 percent".

increasing hostilities grew between the French in the St. Lawrence River Valley, the Haudenosaunee and the English. The Haudenosaunee became increasingly intertwined in the political upheaval of the colonial powers, who were sought dominion over the region. These decades of colonial-Indian relations were characterized by the Covenant Chain, a name given to a series of alliances between the English in New York and the Haudenosaunee. In the late seventeenth century, however, the Haudenosaunee held diplomatic ties with the various colonial powers and the Haudenosaunee, and not just the English. These diplomatic negotiations and trade agreements briefly divided the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, who had made peace with the French and allowed them into their territories. Meanwhile, the Kanien'kehá:ka on the Eastern front of the Confederacy, held diplomatic ties with the English-Americans and were at war with the French. Jesuit missionaries had already penetrated various Haudenosaunee communities, and had set up missions and installed priests. The Kanien'kehá:ka, however, were initially hostile to the missionaries, and the Jesuits had a difficult time converting them, unlike other nations of the Confederacy and the Hurons, with whom the Jesuits had had some success. By the 1670s, the Jesuits took a new approach to conversion and created missionary villages that welcomed local Indigenous populations. One of these early missionary villages was located on the banks of the St Lawrence river, at La Prairie de la Madeleine, opposite Montreal. By 1673 the mission had been joined by hundreds of visitors, from the Oneida, Kanien'kehá:ka, and other groups including Huron refugees. The mission became to be known by the local Indigenous population as Kahnawake.²⁹

²⁹ Ibid. 119-121, 125. Richter talks extensively about the creation of Kahnawake, and he goes on to explain that although the village was inhabited by various First Nations groups, it is the Mohawk language and culture that prevailed and that by the 18th century few remembered anyone but Mohawks had initially settled there.

The Creation of St. Regis

St. Regis was created as a Jesuit mission in 1755 and was initially composed of several families that had decided to leave the over-populated Kahnawake. These claims are derived from mentions from the Jesuit Relations which attest that St. Regis was founded by Père Gordon, a Jesuit missionary at Kahnawake who convinced several families to leave. Père Gordon claimed that the village was in a desperate state and that “a continual Drunkenness prevailed”.³⁰ Père Gordon sought out “sober and well thinking Indians” and obtained a land grant and consent from the Marquis de Vaudreuil (the last Governor General of New France) to establish the mission. However, this grant has not yet surfaced in archival documents, and it is likely that it never existed. According to historian Jack A. Frisch, St. Regis was created as a refuge for Catholic converts.³¹ Regardless of the families’ various motivations, it is clear that by 1755 Kahnawake was overpopulated and its surrounding farmland overused, and it is rather possible that due to overpopulation in Kahnawake, the area lacked essential resources such as wood or game. All of this contributed to certain families’ need to relocate. While the Marquis de Vaudreuil’s written consent and formal title to the land has not been located, it is likely that the settlement was favourable to the French because it served as a post against the English, who were increasingly encroaching on the region during the French and Indian Wars. St. Regis was therefore seen as a military advantage to the French.³² Transcripts from 1754 available in the *Document Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York, Volume 10*, published in 1858, recount a journey of a soldier named M. St. Pierre, who discovered the settlement:

³⁰ Bonaparte, Darren. “The “Boundaries” of the Early St. Regis Mission” March 25, 2005. <http://www.wampumchronicles.com/boundaries.html>

³¹ Frisch, Jack A. “Tribalism among the St. Regis Mohawks: A Search for Self-Identity” in *Anthropologica*, 1970, New Series, Vol 12, No. 2. Page 208.

³² Ibid, page 208. Frisch states “the community also served, along with the mission at Oswegatchie (Ogdensburg, N.Y.) and Caughnawaga, as a buffer zone against English attempts on Montreal.

This officer had discovered a settlement formed by the people of Saut (Kahnawake) at the mouth of the River St. Louis, at the head of Lake Francis, the place where the Mohawks pass when they are coming to attack our settlement, which has created the suspicion that these same Indians might favour the Mohawk. What more surprised them was, that some of the Saut Indians who accompanied M. St. Pierre endeavored to take the lead when they supposed themselves near the Mohawks, and were so bold as to fire the three shots again as a signal, which have been repeated whenever these Indians have been pursued. These gentlemen have sent some messages, expressive of their displeasure, to the people of the Saut who received them with much attention and have promised to behave better in future ³³

St. Pierre's account suggests the existence of the settlement prior to 1755, and there is no mention of a mission or any Jesuits present on the scene. It is therefore also probable that the settlement of St. Regis was created by families who had left Kahnawake, and were joined there later by Père Gordon, who then seized the opportunity to evangelize the small community. Other claims regarding the creation of the settlement implicate various other actors. Frisch claims that, according to oral tradition, (which he does not disclose) among the first inhabitants of St. Regis were two white men who were raised as Kanien'kehá:ka in , each of whom had married the daughter of a chief. He goes on to say that "the mission at St. Regis was composed of several different native groups," but predominantly Kanien'kehá:ka and that many Abenakis moved to the mission along with members of various other nations of the Confederacy, such as the Onondagas, who were fleeing from the British, who had seized their lands in the mission of Oswegatchie.³⁴ While the Kanien'kehá:ka have three major clans, the Turtle, Wolf and Bear, in

³³ Agent Brodhead, John Romeyn. *Documents relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York; Produced in Holland, England and France*. Edited by E.B. O'Callaghan, M.D., L.L.D. Vol. X (Albany: New York 1858). Page 105.

³⁴ Frisch, "Tribalism among the St. Regis Mohawks", 210.

the 1880s the clans of St. Regis were the Bear clan, the Big Pipe, the Wolf, Tortoise, Rock and Bark.³⁵

The Treaty of Paris, whose signature in 1763 ended the Seven Years War, had prescribed the 45th parallel as the border between the United States and the British colonies of Upper and Lower Canada. The border ran through St. Regis and superficially divided the settlement into two sections, one south of the St. Lawrence and the other to the north. Despite its division across different political territories, the tribe continued to act as a single entity. In 1796 a delegation from St. Regis accepted the State of New York's offer of a six-square-mile reservation, and in 1802, New York legislature imposed a new governing system upon the reserve, in which three chiefs would act as the political representatives through an electoral system.³⁶ This legislation aimed to discontinue traditional governing system of the Kanien'kehá:ka, in which chiefs are chosen for life by the clan mothers. After the War of 1812, the community was divided into two separate reserves and political entities; one on the American side of the border, contained in the state of New York, and the other on the Canadian side of the border, with land in both Upper Canada and Lower Canada.³⁷ The band system and its territorial, jurisdictional and political regulation was solidified on the Canadian side with the *Indian Act* of 1876, which is described in greater detail in Chapter 2.

³⁵ Frisch claims that the St. Regis Mohawks have four major clans- the Turtle, Wolf, Bear and Snipe and also individuals belonging to the Deer clans, however a petition signed by the Life Chiefs of St. Regis in 1896, stated that their represented clans were the Bear, Big Pipe, Wolf, Turtoise, Rock and Bark. For the petition see LAC RG2 VOL 727, Reel C-3653. 5.

³⁶ Frisch, "Tribalism among the St. Regis Mohawks", 213.

³⁷ The War of 1812 had solidified the national border for the United State and Canada, which were created following the Revolutionary War.

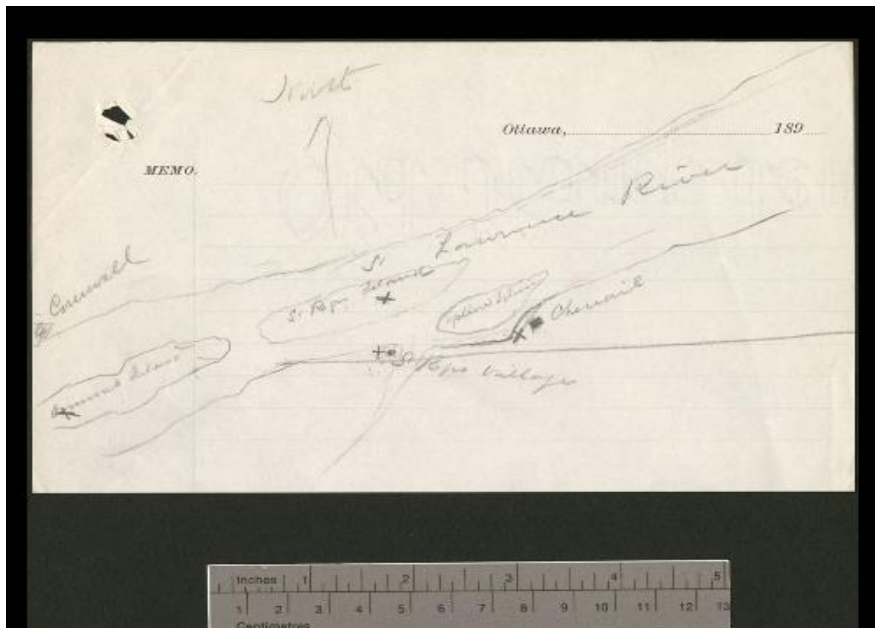
The “Canadian” Reserve

The division of the reserve by the 45th parallel meant that the Canadian side was fragmented into a small portion of land connected to the American reserve, as well as a number of islands in the St. Lawrence river. By 1880, the time frame in which my archival research and research interest begins, the Canadian side of the reserve was divided into six different bands. On the largest island, just north of the American side, was the Cornwall Island Band; the next two islands to the east were home to the St. Regis Island Band and the Yellow Island Band, and these were followed by the smaller islands of Sugar Bush and Chenial, each home to a distinct band. Finally, inland of the Quebec provincial border lay Reserve No. 15, which stretched eastward until the Salmon River and the township of Dundee. In 1880, this territory was inhabited by the Dundee band. While each band was distinguished by its area, the St. Regis Band (St. Regis Reserve) encompassed all of them, and all were administered by a common Department of Indian Affairs Agency. The bands were collectively represented by a common elected band council which consisted of twelve life chiefs and a band clerk. The council house was located on the mainland, in the St. Regis Village. The elective chief system was introduced to the community in 1879 following the *Indian Act*, which sought to eradicate traditional systems of governance and replace them with a new imposed electoral system.

There were three main settler towns surrounding the reserve: Dundee in Quebec, Cornwall in Ontario, and the American town of Massena in New York State. In 1903, the reserve covered an area of approximately 6,800 acres.³⁸ Much of the reserve land was leased and rented to settlers. In the last quarter of the nineteenth-century, the leasing of the Band’s land dramatically increased, and there were frequent disputes regarding the division of lots amongst

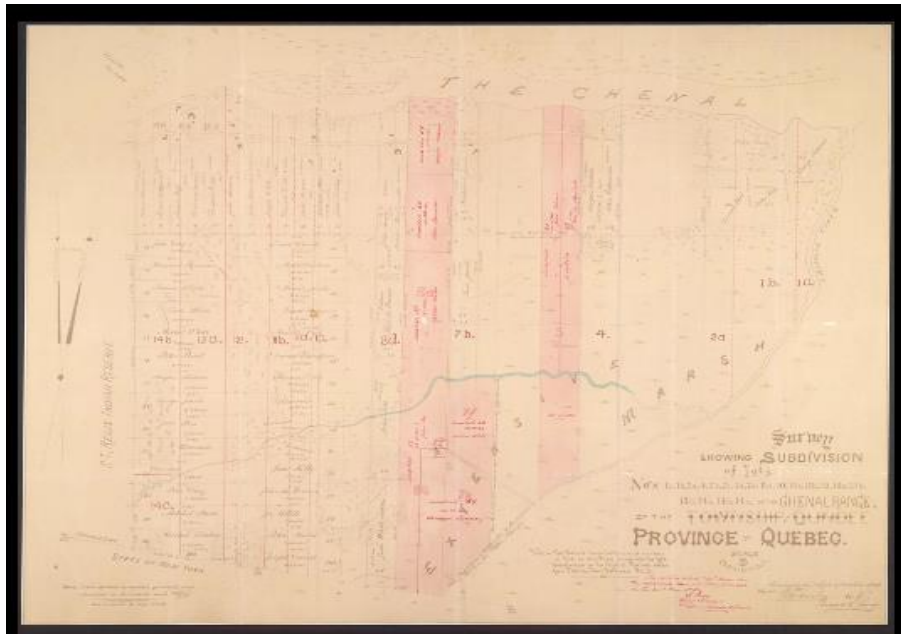
³⁸ Long George. Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended June 1903. (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson 1904). Page 129.

the band, especially when executing the will of a deceased member. The land which the band inhabited was fertile farming land with rich fishing grounds. The band would also sell the sand from the riverbanks to settlers and nearby companies. While the territory was extensive, it was difficult to maneuver between locations, which, to the extent that it made their territories less accessible to government agents, was advantageous to the band.³⁹ Today this region is wooded with thick maple and pine forests, but starting in the 1880s there was a shortage of timber and wood on the reserve, an issue which will be thoroughly discussed in chapter 3.



< Figure 1
Map of the St. Regis
Island bands, drawn by
Indian Agent George
Long in 1898. RG10M
78903/78, Box number:
2000002159, File
number: 24238

³⁹ There were numerous instances in the letterbooks written by the agents, in which bad weather had not allowed the agents to cross to the various islands to attend meetings and survey the land.



< Figure 2
Map of Reserve No. 15 or the
Dundee band by division of
lots. 1892. RG10M 76703/9,
Box number: 2000001840

According to annual report written by agent John Davidson in 1880, the total population of the community was, 1037; however, the village, Davidson claims, was depopulated while the majority of its inhabitants were away picking hops.⁴⁰ Many families would leave their homes during the winter to hunt in regions further north, and the reserve was often empty in the fall and winter months, although the elderly and families without a male head of household would typically stay behind. By 1890, the total population was, 1172 and the reserve consisted of 157 homes; by 1904 the population had increased to, 1398 individuals, most of which were young people under the age of 21.⁴¹ Although the 45th parallel border line divides the reserve into two, there were frequent exchanges between the two subdivisions and intermarriage was common. Families and individuals frequently changed their residence from one side of the border to the other. For example, an 1890 letter from Agent Long to Ottawa stated that there were 18 families

⁴⁰ Davidson, John. Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended June 1881. (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson 1881). Page 42.

⁴¹ Statistics taken from Annual Reports of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1880 to 1903.

of the Canadian band residing on the American side.⁴² Although the community was divided into two distinct political entities, one Canadian and one American, the two groups were socially, politically and economically intertwined. Members would move freely from one reserve to the other and advised one another on issues relating to land-leasing, timber-cutting, and elections.

The economic activities of the members varied, but the majority of households depended on wage labour. Most families had gardens or some farmland, and some men worked on the railroad or as labourers at nearby mills. The primary occupations of adult males were farming, fishing, hunting, trapping and working as guides for tourists. The women worked crafting baskets and lacrosse sticks. There were several destitute families in the reserve, and it was primarily women and the elderly who most needed support. Prior to the arrival of agent Long in 1886, blankets, food and monies were distributed once a year, typically in the winter, although the chiefs requested money to support the poor and destitute much more frequently. During Long's period as the reserve agent, the distribution of blankets, goods and monies dramatically decreased.

The annual reports mention two churches on the Reserve: a Catholic church in the Village of St. Regis and a Methodist church on Cornwall Island, though only a minority of the residents of Cornwall Island were Protestant. Disputes between the members of different churches were not unheard of, but typically they were minor problems that could be solved within the community without the intervention of the agents. The repairs and construction of the churches was an ongoing issue in the twenty year period from 1880 to 1900, and the agents were generally more willing to distribute funds for repairs to the churches, which constantly needed repairs, than for other reasons, like buying medicine, constructing roads, or aiding destitute

⁴² LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 9. 470.

members. Throughout the twenty-year period there were numerous petitions from the community requesting money for church repairs and other infrastructure projects, such as building a road in the reserve,⁴³ and often it was through the persistent chiefs' demands that the agents were induced to provide the necessary funds. It is unclear in the letterbooks the names of the individuals that ran the churches and provided religious services, but the 1889 annual report written by agent George Long describes a Reverend Mr. Mainville as being "attentive to the spiritual wants of the Indians".⁴⁴

Perhaps one of the most frequent issues mentioned throughout all the letterbooks, besides land sales, leases and accounting, is that of schools on the reserve. In 1881 there were three schools: one at the village of St. Regis, another newly built on Chenail Island, and a third school on Cornwall island that employed an Indian teacher from Oka⁴⁵. Another school was built in 1887, but by 1904, when the population of children was at its height, there were only two schools left on the reserve, and some children were sent to a nearby industrial school.⁴⁶ The schools were typically in bad shape and in constant need of reconstruction and repair, and they did not have stoves, coal or firewood for heating in the winter months in either the teachers' dwelling or the classrooms. Attendance was generally low, and the issue of low attendance was a constant preoccupation for the agents. For example, in his annual report from 1889, agent Long claimed that, out of 250 children, only 94 attended school, with a daily average attendance of 50. Long goes on to say that "it is nearly impossible to get them to attend school regularly".⁴⁷ This was a

⁴³ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 8. 170.

⁴⁴ Long George. Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended June 1889. (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson 1904). Page 123. The reverend was named Moïse Mainville and was a Catholic priest who wrote a book in Mohawk in 1890.

⁴⁵ Also known as Kanesatake, but written in the letterbooks as Oka.

⁴⁶ Although the name of the Industrial school is not specified in the letters, I assumed that it was a residential school located outside of the reserve.

⁴⁷ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 8. 123.

continuous issue reported by nearly all agents stationed at St. Regis between 1880 and 1900. It was not until the 20th century that attendance increased, and parents sent their children to the schools on a daily basis.⁴⁸ They provide a lens to examine the various concerns present at the reserve, and the conflict surrounding the schools demonstrates the community's mistrust of government workers, in particular agents and teachers.

The Cornwall Island Protestant school is a unique case. Most reserve schools across Canada during this epoch were taught by missionaries, church representatives, or government-hired white teachers, and adhered to a strict program of Enfranchisement.⁴⁹ Schools' rarely had Indigenous teachers who spoke the local Indigenous language, and most teachers were not integrated members of the community in which they taught. While it is unclear how long the Indigenous teacher taught at the Cornwall school, he was dismissed in 1881 by a Catholic missionary who claimed the "Indian" teacher was a Protestant. The dismissal of the teacher, a Kanien'kehá:ka from Oka, outraged the members of the community. Throughout the fall of 1881 and in ensuing years, they wrote several petitions to Ottawa and the Department of Indian Affairs demanding an Iroquois teacher who spoke their language to teach at the school. In the fall of 1881, the Protestant families of Cornwall Island wrote a petition requesting that a Protestant school be built and taught by an Indian Protestant teacher. The island had 18 Protestant families with 35 school age children between the ages of 4 to 16. By the winter of the same year, as agent John Davidson reported to Ottawa, the Protestant families had proceeded to build a small school

⁴⁸Ahkwesáhsne has a unique history with regards to schools on the reserve. In 1979 the Akwesasne Freedom School was created, with the aim of revitalizing the Mohawk language and teaching children and youth about Mohawk culture and tradition. Although the school was created in the late twentieth century it is a part of a steadfast history of self-determination of the Mohawk of Ahkwesáhsne. For the history of the Freedom School see the work by Louellyn White. *Free to be Mohawk*.

⁴⁹ Enfranchisement was a term coined in the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* of 1868, that aimed at removing the rights of status Indians, and assimilating them to the broader settler culture. The history of enfranchisement is discussed in detail in chapter 2.

on one of the band member's property and hired a Kanien'kehá:ka girl from the Bay of Quinte to teach there. Furthermore, they had taken the stove from the Catholic school and placed it in the new school, enraging Mrs. Murphy, the Catholic teacher. In May 1882, the construction of the Protestant school was approved by Privy Council, with the provision that a Protestant minister would be hired as teacher.⁵⁰ By 1890, agent George Long reported that fewer than five pupils attended the school and requested it be closed and the building be moved to the St. Regis village to be used instead as the council house building.⁵¹

The case of the Protestant school shows, among many things, the complexities of the religious divide within the reserve, and leads to many interesting, unanswered questions. Were the families dissatisfied with the Catholic schools because of the government/church-appointed teachers? Was the Protestant school opened with the hope of securing an Indian teacher? Was the religious divide between the Protestant and Catholic ones a mere façade, as the families knew the authorities were more likely to respond to a religious appeal than a direct request for an Indigenous teacher? The correspondence in the letterbooks suggests that the families were persistent in desire for a teacher, especially one who could speak their language and teach it to the children. For example, in 1880 Agent John Davidson reported that the chiefs expressed their desire for an Indian teacher for the St. Regis school, telling Davidson that they could get a "competent teacher from another Mohawk band".⁵² Furthermore, nearly each agent struggled to convince families to send their children to school. In fact, there were years in which the chiefs actively discouraged band members from sending their children to the Christian-run schools. By 1890, the number of children attending school had drastically dropped. We may speculate that

⁵⁰ RG10 VOL. 2162, Reel C-11172

⁵¹ Ibid, 37.

⁵² LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 7. 4.

this was due to the efforts of the chiefs who rejected the Christian schools, but this is unconfirmed. The one thing that is clear in the sources is the community's desire to install their own teacher Kanien'kehá:ka teacher.

The creation of the Protestant school on Cornwall island is one example out of many of the community's efforts to involve itself in the administration and governance of the reserve. St. Regis was a unified community that had strong inter-governmental organization and active participation of the band members in its affairs. Although members did not always agree on certain issues, the unification of the community was present. Their collective work of self-governance, care, mutual aid, as well as their ability to mediate disputes among members, is documented on a regular basis in the letterbooks, petitions, and administrative correspondence. Their involvement and participation in arranging their affairs ensured that the agents did not supersede them in any decision regarding life on the reserve. Nearly all agents who were stationed at the reserve commented on their frustrations while managing St. Regis due to the constant opposition they faced. This process of inter-communal organization transpired and solidified throughout the twenty-year period I researched. In the following chapters I explore the development of methods of resistance and self-governance of the band, and their unyielding opposition to the imposition and interference of the government of Canada and the agents' operations on the reserve.

Chapter 2.

“I have the honour to be Sir, your obedient Servant”

“ I believe it is sufficient for me to say anything more as the Department is well aware what it is to have dealings with Indians”
Indian Agent John Davidson, 1882

The history of the Department of Indian Affairs begins in the mid eighteenth century, when commissioners were appointed by British official in the thirteen colonies to act as diplomats to various First Nations. The Northern Department was run by William Johnson, an Irish landowner, army officer, and diplomat with longstanding connection to the Haudenosaunee. Johnson had lived among the Kanien’kehá:ka and learnt their language and traditions. His role, from the perspective of the British crown, was to ensure the stability of the alliance between the Haudenosaunee and the British, and to prevent disputes between various Indigenous groups and British settlers. Commissioners, such as Johnson, maintained relations with the First Nations by distributing gifts and ensuring the settlers did not encroach on their lands. The Natives were seen as potential military allies to the British for the Seven Years Wars and up until the War of 1812. Thus, the commissioners had an important role in ensuring that the Natives remain allies with the British.¹ A significant feature of these eras of diplomacy, trade and military alliances are the Covenant Chain. Promoted by William Johnson, the Chains signified the peaceful alliance between the British and the Haudenosaunee. The treaties and Covenant Chain left the Haudenosaunee and other nations believing that the English considered them as sovereign political entities; an understanding that was present throughout the petitions written by the Haudenosaunee in the centuries that followed.

¹ Titley, Brian. *The Indian Commissioners*. 2.

The truce of the War of 1812 significantly altered British relations to the Haudenosaunee, who were no longer needed as military allies, and were now seen as liability. By the 1820s the British changed their approach towards the First Nations. They were now treated as colonial subjects to be “encouraged in every possible manner the progress of religious knowledge and education”.² Thus began campaigns of civilization, acculturation and the integration of natives to the settler society. The mission of “civilizing the Indian” and eventually somewhat integrating them into the broader settler public informed the policies created by the Canadian government for the next two centuries. The eras of the William Johnson and commissioners’ diplomacy and personal relations with the First Nations ceased and was replaced by an impersonal bureaucratic system. Indigenous people were now regarded as a problem to the state, rather than sovereign political entities and allies. At the heart of this civilizing mission was the goal of eventually eliminating First Nations peoples all together. As famously stated by Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932; “the government will in time reach the end of its responsibility as the Indians progress into civilization and finally disappear as a separate and distinct people, not by race extinction but by gradual assimilation with their fellow-citizens”.³ This responsibility of assimilating the “Indians” was divided between Christian and Catholic missionaries and Department employees, who would eventually become known as Indian agents.

In 1830 the Indian Department remained under military command and was split into two offices: one station in Upper Canada and the second in Lower Canada. It is during this time in which the reserve system was established in Upper Canada. After Confederation, Department of Indian Affairs developed into a highly centralized administrative body, a process that included

² Brian Titley, *The Indian Commissioners*. 4.

³ Robin Jarvis Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye*. 30.

the continuous integration of policies, laws, and administrative systems. This era of state administrative and bureaucratic formation was in tandem with the development of the professionalization of officials such as clerks, agents and other bureaucratic and administrative workers. The administrative system that was built to manage and survey First Nations peoples in Canada was finalized in the 1867 *British North American Act*, which gave the federal government exclusive authority over “assigned Indians and lands reserved for Indians”.⁴ In 1874 Lieutenant Lawrence Vankoughnet, who was an aspiring bureaucrat with family connection to John A. Macdonald, was appointed Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, and the Department became its own administrative branch. The following year the system of superintendents and agents was established, and Indian Agents were stationed in reserves across the Dominion. The legislations and policies regarding Indian administration was later reinforced in the 1876 *Indian Act*, which was an amalgamation of an existing policies regarding “Indian” supervision.

The *Indian Act* of 1876 aimed to strip First Nations peoples of any sovereign power they might have had and categorized them as wards of the Canadian state. The *Act* dealt with three main areas of concerns: lands, membership and government, with an emphasis on enfranchisement of Indians and their eventual integration into white society.⁵ The *Act* defined the term “Indian” as any male person of Indian blood who belonged to a particular band, a child of any such person or a woman who is or was lawfully married to such as person. It branded an Indian according to blood or marriage and simultaneously crafted the band membership as a

⁴ The management and surveillance over First Nations peoples in Canada begun with the 1860 *Management of Indian Lands and Properties Act* which created the Indian Department as a branch of Crown lands that were to be administrated by the federal government rather than the provinces. The federal responsibility over First Nations was reinstated in the 1867 *British North America Act*. For more information see Leslie, John. Ron Maguire, and Robert G. Moore. *The Historical Development of the Indian Act* (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1978) 50.

⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

central criterion for Indian status. Furthermore, it also defined several conditions in which an Indian, through various means and specifically enfranchisement, would be stripped of his or her status. The program of enfranchisement, created through the *Enfranchisement Act* of 1869, intended to submerge Indigenous people into the broader settler public through a process of gradual assimilation. This assimilation would be deemed successful when “Indians” could show proof of managing their own affairs and demonstrate their enculturation into white society.⁶ Once enfranchised they would be stripped of their status and divorced from their band. Additional ways a status Indian could lose status is by residing away from the reserve, or marrying a non-Indian.⁷ Other clauses of the *Act* include the issuing of location tickets for individuals lands in the reserve, penalties and offences committed by trespassers onto the reserve, and compensation for expropriation of Indian lands by public works such as railroads or roads. Approximately twenty clauses are dedicated to the sales and management of Indian lands, and other resources, which details the management and investments of band funds by government agents.

Originally implemented in the *Enfranchisement Act* of 1869, clauses sixty-one to sixty-three of the *Indian Act* reinstated regulations regarding elections and local government. The *Enfranchisement Act* stated that the “Governor may order that the chiefs of any tribe, band or body of Indians shall be elected by the male members of each Indian Settlement of the full age of twenty-on years... and they shall in such case be elected for a period of three years, unless

⁶ The criteria for enfranchisement were originally listed as: if a person received a university degree or joined a profession, was a person fit or shown to be civilized (this was a loose term that could at times apply to simply speaking, writing and reading English) as well as become a priest or minister. These criteria changed in the 1920s and a person could apply for enfranchisement by showing that they were “fit” for joining Canadian society.

⁷ See Leslie, John. Ron Maguire, and Robert G. Moore. *The Historical Development of the Indian Act*. 61. Clauses c,d,e of subsection 3 of the *Indian Act* deals specifically with women. It said that if married to a non-status Indian or white man she automatically ceased to be an Indian. If marrying into an Indian man from another band, she loses her place among her band.

deposed by the Governor”.⁸ The *Indian Act* brought little change into the local government system of elective chiefs which the *Enfranchisement Act* imposed. The aim of creating a local elective government was to accelerate the assimilation process, as well as impose a governing body that would adhere and answer to the DIA. The electoral system was imposed to ensure that the federal government could exercise power over the band and supersede traditional government. The elected chiefs were required to answer to the agents stationed in their reserves and were considered as a form of middlemen between the band and the Indian agent. While the *Enfranchisement Act* predated the *Indian Act*, the election of chiefs only begun to take place in Ahkwesáhsne in the mid 1870’s. By the 1880s the elections had begun to transform inter-community relations and caused a variety of issues within the community. Tensions mounted between those who respected the hereditary system, and those who wanted elections and supported the program of enfranchisement. However, the elections would eventually become an event that unified the community against the Federal government. Over time the community increasingly resisted the elections and integrated to a wider movement of pan-Indianism that was developing throughout North America.

Ottawa and Its Agents

By 1880 nearly every aspect of the lives of the residents of St. Regis was dictated, controlled and surveyed by the Department of Indian Affairs through the work and the operation of the agents stationed at the reserve. The agents’ job was to operate the reserve through directions given by their administrative superiors in Ottawa, who they would correspond with on

⁸ *Gradual Enfranchisement Act*, 1869 c. 10. <https://dev.nctr.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/1869-Gradual-Enfranchisement-Act.pdf>. Accessed July 2022.

daily basis through letters that were numerically labelled.⁹ The department was organized into two distinct sectors; an inside service and outside service.¹⁰ Headquartered in Ottawa, the inside service was the administrative office in which higher position personnel were located and where all administrative decisions were made. According to Brian Titley, by 1880 the Department office in Ottawa had less than 40 employees: the Deputy Superintendent General, a chief clerk, an accountant, clerical staff and a number of messengers and unskilled personnel who were mostly engaged in administrative tasks such as copying letters.¹¹ The outside services amounted to over 400 employees, who were for the most part agents stationed in reserves. Letters written by the agents were sent to Ottawa to be read by the Superintendent General and his close staff, who instructed the agents on every single decision and actions that the agents were to take. This administrative system was hierarchical, and attaining a job at the department in Ottawa, or even as an Indian agent, was based on political connection and favouritism.¹² Working for the department was seen as a prestigious position that would attract men who had a strong incentive to climb up the political and bureaucratic ladder of government, a pattern clearly exhibited by at least one agent stationed in St. Regis.

The agents were required to write daily letters to Ottawa and to copy their letters in letterbooks, which were the mass majority of my primary sources. The letters from the agents were polite, respectful and their correspondence exhibits a culture of strict administrative

⁹ The letters received by the agents from their superiors were numerically organized, and the agents would refer to the number of the letter when responding. Typically the agents would begin a letter with the following passage: "Sir, I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter of this [date] instant no.[letter numbers such as 31916]".

¹⁰ Internal and External service was not the known name for the branches, rather a term coined by Titley in *A Narrow Vision*.

¹¹ Titley, *A Narrow Vision*. Page 13

¹² In his study of the Department in *Narrow Vision*, Titley follows the career of Duncan Campbell Scott who was the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs and a career bureaucrat who climbed the political ladder in Ottawa. Titley follows Scott's career and shows how he had climbed the political ladder through his cunning personality and political connections.

hierarchy that can be mostly characterized by subordination and militaristic courtesy. According to Titley, Superintendent General Vankoughnet, who headed the department from 1874 until he was forced to retire in 1893, was “an inflexible bureaucrat who attempted to centralize all decision-making in his own hands.”¹³ He kept expense at a minimum, especially for budgeting on essential aid for the reserves such as food rations or school upkeep. Aside from the daily letters, the agents were required to provide annual reports about the reserves where they were stationed. The annual reports included a comprehensive account of demographic patterns to economic occupation, criminal behaviour (mostly regarding liquor) and school attendance. The reports grew increasingly detailed throughout the twenty year period I examined, and by the early 1900s they entailed exhaustive statistics about the reserves. They included details such as the number of deaths, baptisms and marriages, calculative survey of farming tools, cattle, grain cultivation and the total sales made from resources such as timber or sand.

The agents negotiated a salary and received an annual sum somewhere between \$150 to \$200.¹⁴ They were also entitled to a 10% commission of the sales and leases of the reserve’s lands that they managed. The lands surrounding individual lots (that were distributed to the community) were rented out to settlers for habitation and farming. Rent leases were collected on a monthly and annual basis by the agent, depending on the contract of each lot or land. The leasing contracts drastically differed, they could be 999 years lease, 99 or less, and the rent payments were collected on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis depending on the contract.¹⁵ A vast part of the agents’ job was to collect the rent and write contracts, which they would record

¹³ Titley. *A Narrow Vision*. Page 14.

¹⁴ In a letter written by Agent Long in the spring of 1895, Long asks for a salary raise to \$200 a year, plus \$35 extra to pay for his coal. LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 10. 749.

¹⁵ For examples of leases see: a contract created by Agent Long in 1890 for lot numbers 13, 14 & 15 to Robert Colquhoun for a 99 years lease. LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 9. 381. See also and a letter written by Agent Tyre regarding a 999 year lease contract made in 1796 which was still valid. LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 8. 259.

in the letterbooks and send to Ottawa for record keeping. It is unclear to me from the information in the letterbooks if the money was sent to Ottawa or kept at the office of the agent, or a nearby bank.

The commissions they received drastically increased their salaries.¹⁶ They were an incentive for the agents to sell and lease as much reserve land as they could, regardless of the disapproval or consent of the band.¹⁷ The agents often wrote about their desire for higher pay and were highly attentive with their commission payments. The commissions were an issue that caused disputes between the agents, especially during transition from one agent to another. For example, in a letter written in November 1884 by the newly appointed Agent Robert Tyre, he claimed that his predecessor Agent John Davidson had in his possession the accounting books. Tyre wrote: “He [Davidson] kept the book for 12 days longer, than I sent a person for the books and M. Davidson was very much annoyed at my sending for them”. Tyre goes on to complain

¹⁶ The annual sum from commissions varied each year. However, the agents were prone to make somewhere along \$100 on top of their salaries. For example, in 1885 Agent Tyre collected \$88.35 for commission up until the 31st of March. See LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 8. 261. This topic of the commissions the agents received, and the total accounting operation of the reserves is understudied, yet it is an issue so very essential to land claim settlements taking place today. The limitation of a graduate thesis did not allow me to do a thorough examination into the accounting of the reserve, and specifically the agent’s commissions, but I suspect that they made a whole lot of money and had incentive to sell off reserve lands, regardless of the opinion of the band. I believe that studying the history of the sales of reserve lands is incredibly important by highlighting the government’s past and its current obligations to repay for the illegal actions of government agents. A contract created (without the consent of the St. Regis Band) in 1888 by Agent Long has been the heart of a land claims that was settled in 2020 between the Government of Canada and the Mohawks of Ahkwasasne. I came across this claim during my research, coming to realize that the year 1888 was entirely missing from the letterbooks. For more information on the Land Claim see the MCA Settlement Agreement <http://www.akwasasne.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/MCA-Settlement-Agreement.pdf>.

¹⁷ The agents would do their best to steer the bands opinion regarding the renting or selling of lands, and at times try to manipulate the band council. If the band did not agree to the selling of land, the agent would do their best to convince them otherwise, or lease the lands without the consent of the band. For example, in 1890 Long calls for a band meeting over the leasing of islands and lands near Dundee, the band votes against the sale, and Long writes that he is “doing his best to convince them otherwise”. In a few months, the life chiefs send a complaint to Ottawa, accusing Long for leasing lands against their will. LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 9. 396 & 419. It is possible that not all agents profited from the sale of Indian lands, and that it is a phenomenon exclusive to particular reserves such as St. Regis, however the lack of research on this particular topic leaves much to uncover as mentioned in footnote 14.

about Davidson and accused him of intending to “secure all the rents so that I should have very little commissions for my share next year.”¹⁸

The agents’ job was dynamic and demanding. They lived in the reserve or nearby it. Primarily they were the accountants responsible for the band funds, which were considerable amounts of money that belong to the band through sales of land and other incomes. The agents were expected to record all financial dealings and contracts and keep a detailed record of the account. This fund was strictly controlled by their superiors in Ottawa, in which they had to request and get an approval on any sum to be taken from the fund. As trustees of the band fund, the agents were also responsible for the distribution of money of the members of the band, the schools and the schoolteachers’ salaries. The agents controlled access to food rations and other distribution of goods and the overall expenses of anything relating to the reserve, from fixing the churches to building roads. They were the reserve mediators for disputes between members, and administrated and managed healthcare related issues like vaccination, restocking of medicinal supplies, scheduling of doctor appointments, as well as running band councils’ meetings and elections.

The agents were by no means passive and impartial mediators representing Government interest. They were given authority to exercise power over the band in numerous ways, and did not hesitate to use this authority. They were hardly biased or impartial, and were expressive of their opinions about the council’s decisions or their personal thoughts concerning members of the band they saw as agitators, or others which they may have favoured. According to the *Indian Act*, the agents were free to impose the government’s authority in a variety of ways, not only through the restraining of the band’s funds. They were given the right to remove members of the

¹⁸ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 8. 239.

band (after receiving an approval from Ottawa) and acted as justices of the peace free to arrest and charge any band member who acted against provisions set by the *Indian Act* and the *Criminal Code*. According to historian Robin Jarvis Brownlie, in his work on Indian agents stationed in Manitoulin Island and Parry Sound agencies in the interwar period,¹⁹ observed that “for minor offences (most often for alcohol consumption) the agent frequently laid the charges himself, investigated them, examined the evidence, pronounced the verdict, and, if applicable assigned a penalty.”²⁰ The agents of St. Regis indeed used this power at numerous opportunities, especially in regard to men who they disapproved of, who they often accused for liquor consumption, selling liquor or other infractions. Throughout the twenty-year period of which my researched was focused, the agents increasingly grew involved in local disputes. By the time Agent George Long was stationed as agent of the reserve, he had also admitted two members to nearby insane asylums and penitentiaries, by requesting them to be clinically diagnosed as insane by a doctor.²¹ Thus, by the turn of the twentieth century their roles had developed into that of an accountant, policeman, social worker, school director and administrative authority of the reserve.

Agent John Davidson

John Davidson was stationed at the St. Regis agency from 1876 to 1884, when he was removed from office. Davidson lived near the township of Dundee, on the American side of the border in a small town called Fort Covington. He was a somewhat disorganized accountant, and his book keepings were messy and sometimes written on the margins of his letters. His relations

¹⁹ *A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario 1918-1939*.

²⁰ Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye*. 39.

²¹ There are two individuals who were sent to an insane asylum. One was a woman by the name of Nancy Skins who was admitted to the St. Jean-de-Dieu Lunatic Asylum in 1889, under the direction of Agent Long. The second was a man John Lafrance who was admitted to jail in 1886 and later sent to a lunatic asylum by Agent Long in 1887. For the file on Nancy Skins see LAC RG2 VOL. 550. Reel C-3404 and for the file on John Lafrance see LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. File T-11955, Letterbook 8. 357.

with the band were unfriendly to say the least, and at times even hostile. Davidson was unfamiliar with the community and in a letter to his superiors regarding an election held, he wrote: “I could not distinguish one from another” complaining that they all have similar names and that they all look the same.²² He was absent from the reserve, and instead had his office in the town some 15 kilometers away from the St. Regis village. His location was problematic for the band, who were frustrated by his absence. In a petition asking to have him removed from his post as the reserve agent, the members of the band claimed that “Davidson does not attend properly to our business” and that he lived too far from the village, and that he was “occupied with other matters” and that he did not care about the well-being of the band.²³ This petition, written in 1879 and signed by over 130 members of the band, was investigated by the Department, who seem to have considered removing Davidson from his post. In a correspondence defending his claim, Davidson expressed his frustration towards the “Indians” and made his opinion of them clear. He was often in disagreement with them over matters relating to sales and leases of lands, consumption of alcohol, and other issues (such as vaccination).²⁴ In several of his letters to Ottawa, Davidson complained that St. Regis was too problematic to manage. While in other letters he showed his distaste of the Indigenous people, and wrote to his superiors: “I suppose it is superfluous for me to say anything more as the Department is well aware what it is to have dealings with the Indians.”²⁵

In September 1884 Davidson was removed from his post and a new agent, Robert Tyre, was stationed at St. Regis. The reason for the dismissal of Davidson is not entirely clear,

²² LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. File T-11955, Letterbook 8. 174.

²³ LAC RG10 VOL 2080 FILE 11896 REEL C-11152

²⁴ For example: in April 1881, Davidson wrote to his supervisor that the chiefs refuse to have the band vaccinated. He suggested to send an “Indian” doctor to convince the chiefs, who refuse to listen to the advice of white men. LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. File T-11955, Letterbook 7. 30.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

however, correspondence between Tyre and Davidson reveals an issue concerning the bookkeeping of the band. Tyre was accusing Davidson of stealing money and his commissions. Tyre wrote to his supervisor complaining that Davidson stole his commissions by collecting them days before his dismissal. While Davidson was removed from his post in 1884, he appeared several times in the agents' correspondence throughout the next ten or so years: once after Tyre's funeral as a temporary agent, and then in the late 1880s as the Treasurer of Dundee, making arrangement over sales of lands with Agent George Long. Davidson's career did not end at his position as agent, but flourished in the nearby town.

Agents Robert Tyre, D. Baker & George Long.

Agent Robert Tyre was stationed to replace Agent Davidson in 1884, however he fell ill and passed away in October 1886. While alive and stationed as agent he was in constant disputes with the band. After falling ill, his wife took over his letter writings and worked on his behalf. Tyre was replaced temporarily by a man named D. Baker, an inexperienced settler who lived in one of the nearby town. The administration sent him a training pamphlet titled "The Facts Respecting Indian Administration in the North-West Territories"²⁶ with the aim of training him in his new position. Baker had the least trouble with the band, and in his several months in office he remained uninvolved with their activities, especially after Chief Lazar told him: "we can manage our own affairs".²⁷

²⁶ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 8. 331 for Baker acknowledging the training pamphlet also for the Pamphlet see LAC RG10 Reel 54700. Department of Indian Affairs. *The Facts Respecting Indian Administration in the North West*. Date of publication unknown. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.54700>. Accessed July 2022.

²⁷ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 8. 343.

George Long was the agent of the St. Regis agency from 1887 to 1911, making him the longest lasting agent at the reserve. He was a meticulous, organized and dedicated worker, and it is not surprising that he remained in his post for over two decades. His handwriting was clear and his grammar correct. His letterbooks ordered and methodological, his accountings tedious and his math always added up. Long was a dedicated civil worker who took his job seriously and sincerely believed in the civilizing mission towards First Nations peoples. In a letter to his supervisor pleading his dedication to the cause he wrote “I would be sorry to be in any way an obstruction in the advancement of the Indians and if you consider it so I am willing to give up the agency.”²⁸ He wrote long and articulated annual reports with increasing detail each year; from counting the number of children attending schools and various detailed surveys he conducted of the reserve. Long wrote and signed countless contracts for lease and land sales of the reserve lands. He drew detailed maps of the reserve, and during his decades as Agent more land was sold and leased than all other agents combined. Long profited greatly from his management of the reserve lands, and in numerous occasions made leasing deals with renters, that were not consented by the band. In other times he tried to manipulate the band council to agree on renting lands, which he claimed would be beneficial for them.

Agent Long lived in the village of St. Regis and was attentive to all that was happening in the reserve. He often called for band council meetings (many in which hardly anyone attended) and was highly involved in the political and governing bodies of the band. He openly expressed his favouritism towards certain members and disdain for others, especially regarding the chiefs, who he would easily remove from their posts if they objected him. Long took on a paternalistic attitude towards the Natives and over the years his relationship with the community grew

²⁸ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 10. 684.

increasingly hostile. He saw the Kanien'kehá:ka of St. Regis as people who needed to be managed and policed. For example, in a letter regarding an election on November 10, 1891, Long wrote "I think it was a step in the right way a check on the liquor purity to show them, that they cannot do as they pleased."²⁹ He was the first agent to call constables to the reserve and once demanded over 20 policemen in full uniform to aid him supervise an election. Long was less lenient on the spending of the band's fund and was frugal distributing money to the chiefs for various requests they may have had, such as fixing the school, or helping the destitute. Two schools closed during his years as an agent, and vaccination of the members of the band, especially children, increased during his time.³⁰

Elections at St Regis.

The elections in St. Regis typically took place during the summer, when the majority of the community was living on the reserve. While the *Indian Act* imposed a law on an election of chiefs every three years, in St. Regis this was typically not the case, especially under the supervision of Agent Long. The *Indian Act* dictated that the number of chiefs elected was determined by the population of the band. It stated that a chief represents a band of thirty members, or one chief and two second chiefs elected for every two hundred people.³¹ The *Act* then lists eight points in which the elected chiefs were responsible for. The list includes: "the care of public health" maintaining of the construction and repairs of schools, roads and other

²⁹ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 9. 517.

³⁰ Vaccinations were a continuous issue throughout the twenty-year period, in which the band refused to get vaccinated for smallpox. This issue was raised numerous times by all agents, who claim that the chiefs did not allow the band to get vaccinated. In one instance, the chiefs explain to Agent Davidson that they did not need to get vaccinated because they nearly all had already had smallpox, which should immunize them to the disease. The issue of vaccine is fascinating and shows yet another way in which the band refused government interference in their lives and rejected settler culture. It was only by the early 1900s in which Agent Long manages to get vaccination rates up in the reserve, and most of which were children.

³¹ Leslie, John. Ron Maguire, and Robert G. Moore. *The Historical Development of the Indian Act*. 65.

infrastructure, the “observance of order and decorum” of the general council, and other issues such as cattle trespassing and managing the land registration.³² In St. Regis the elections were held to elect one head chief and three second chiefs. The chiefs were given minimal power regarding the governing of the community, and any governing decision was ultimately made by the agents who had authority over their affairs. The agent could dismiss them from their chiefship, or downright disapprove of any of their motions, from fixing the church, constructing a road or most frequently, regarding the leasing and selling of the reserve lands and islands in the St. Lawrence. The elective chiefs were paid an annual salary of \$10 from the band fund, and they were also responsible of the band council meetings.

The *Indian Act* states that elections of chiefs were to be held every three years, yet the elections in St. Regis happened nearly every single year between 1883 to 1899, with an exception of the years 1887 to 1890. However, 1888 is missing from the letterbooks so I cannot confirm that an election did not occur. This pattern of annual elections, that should be held every three years, presents several important findings. First and foremost, the annual elections pattern in St. Regis reflects on the volatility of the electoral system, and how ultimately it was unsuccessful in the first eras of its implementation in St. Regis. The continuous rotation of chiefs by elections was primarily due to the agents calling for re-elections, because of their displeasure with certain elected chiefs. The disposal of chiefs by the agents were frequent and reflect a continuous pattern of individual and community tensions with the agents, who exercised authority and power over the community. There are countless examples throughout the twenty-

³² Ibid, 66.

year period of deposition³³ of chiefs, and the agents' intervention into all matters concerning the community's governing body.

For example, in the spring of 1893 Agent Long advised his superiors in Ottawa of the disposal of Chiefs Loran Pike (who was previously the band clerk) and Chief Thomas White "for incompetency".³⁴ Both men were a cause of trouble for Long since they were elected as second chiefs in February 1892. The two chiefs organized a community incentive to not send the children to school. They were also implicated in an issue even more disturbing to Long. The chiefs had taken upon themselves to collect lease and rent payments, undoubtedly infuriating Long, who expected the commission for himself. Furthermore, the chiefs objected to the sale of islands belonging to the band and had occupied lands in hope of preventing Long from selling them. In an official document from the Privy Council Office dated May 16, 1893 the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs request the deposition of Pike and White, and the request is passed. The report details that the chiefs managed the leasing of land, against the will of the agent.³⁵ Following the deposition of Pike and White, Agent Long called for an election to replace them in July of 1893. This pattern of displeased agents with disobedient chiefs is present with every agent during the twenty-year period and is especially common with Agent Long.

There were various instances in which certain chiefs were disposed of for other reasons, not only for leasing and selling lands. The chiefs could be removed for election fraud, harassment against

³³ Deposition of Chief was the administrative term for removing a chief from their role. The process of removal, like most other decisions, was finalized with the administration in Ottawa. The agents would file a deposition with their superiors who would take the deposition to Privy Council for approval. Depositions of Chiefs are archival documents that can be found in both the RG10 and RG2 collections.

³⁴ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 10. 608.

³⁵ Another disposal of chiefs passed in Privy Council in the year 1888 retells a similar tale, in which three chiefs (John Isaac, Thomas Lazar and George Thomas) were disposed of due to similar situation, in which they had leased lands and managed the payments themselves, ignoring the requests made by the agent. RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a. VOL. 625, Reel C-3611.

the agent or for disobeying clauses of the *Indian Act*, which were typically related to selling liquor or consumption of alcohol.

While most elections were called by the agents due to their discontent with the chiefs, some elections were also called on by the band, who appealed to the agents or sent petitions directly to Ottawa to hold a re-election. There are numerous petitions and requests written by various members of the band, opposing the result of an election or complaining on the behaviour of certain chiefs. In November 1892, a petition was sent to Ottawa signed with 156 names, requesting a new election. Agent Long dismissed the community's call to hold an election and stated that their displeasure is "nothing more than jealousy."³⁶ On some occasions in which the agents listened to the concern of the community and called for a new election.

The power dynamic and political struggle that the elections caused in the reserve were primarily between two distinct parties: one was the portion of the community that supported the hereditary chiefs and hereditary system, the other were the members of the community who supported the newly imposed governing body of elective chiefs. These oppositions began to surface in the mid to late 1880s, but there are also disputes that occurred between individuals, rather than opposing collectives. The chiefs were essentially actors in the community that took on leading roles. Many of the chiefs mentioned in the letterbooks were sincerely motivated leaders that took on the responsibilities of taking care of the well-being of the band. These individuals, which will be introduced in greater details in chapter 3, were often men who voiced the community's needs and visited the agents on a regular basis, regarding matters such as fixing the schools, buildings roads or requesting money from the band fund for various reasons such as

³⁶ LAC, RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 9. 561.

food for the needy, or funeral costs. Others sought chiefship for the various benefits the role provided, such as the annual salary or a place in the band council.

Although there were some years of relatively undisturbed elections, there are two overall patterns contemporaneous in the twenty-year period. The first is that the elections became increasingly problematic for the community on a variety of ways. And the second is that the agents frequently intervened in the result; calling a null or fair election; or by expressing a more preferable outcome to their superiors in Ottawa. The first election I came across, took place in 1883 under the supervision of Agent Davidson. It was a fiasco and a great example to how an election result could be steered by the agent. The election took place in the summer of 1883 to replace Chief Mitchel Solomon, and according to Davidson, there were men who had voted twice, and another vote of a man who was not a member of the band. Davidson could not distinguish between the members, and later had realized that he was deceived. Lost in this confusing situation he asked the Department for advice, and days later proposed that the election be voided. He then suggested that a man named Peter Jacobs be made head chief, saying that “he will put order into things.”³⁷ In 1886 under the supervision of Agent Baker a similar story occurred in which underage voters and a non-member vote was protested by Mitchel Solomon who was favored by Agent Baker. Baker, in support of Solomon, advised Ottawa to call for a re-election.

During the tenure of Agent Long the elections became confrontational, as the community began to mobilize and increasingly object to elections organized by Long. The first dispute began in an election in the summer of 1891. Agent Long claimed that an elected chief John Square sold and supplied alcohol to a party on the day of the election. He requested approval

³⁷ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 8. 175.

from Ottawa for the removal Chief John Square, and called for a re-election in the fall. The call for re-election and the disposal of Chief John Square infuriated the bandmembers. Certain members refused to vote in the re-election and were hostile towards Long who wrote to his superiors: “the Indians are getting very overbearing and abusive, determined to have their own way. I was told by one of the Indians the morning before the poll opened that it would not be safe for me to go.”³⁸ Regardless of their intimidations, Agent Long held the election and later wrote to his supervisor that: “as to their threats and complaints, I do not fear!”³⁹

Several years later in an election held in July 1894 many people refused to vote. The life chiefs and other members of the band signed a petition they sent to Ottawa demanding that the elective system be abolished and instead they plan to practice their own hereditary government based on the Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy.⁴⁰ Tensions between Long and the band regarding the elections, and other issues as well, intensified in the mid 1890s. By 1898 Agent Long wrote to Ottawa that he is “anticipating trouble at the next election.”⁴¹ Regardless of his anticipation of “trouble” Long held an election in which he was confronted by several men, including a Chief called Jake Fire. Long hosted the election but not a single member voted. Believing that this election was deterred by Chief Fire and others, Long called for another election a month later, pleading to his superiors in Ottawa to provide him with 20 policemen. For the rest of the year Long continued to call for numerous elections, in which the band refused to vote. Finally in March 1899 Agent Long held another election. He was confronted at the election with over 200 men and women, who eventually pushed him into the schoolhouse where the polls

³⁸ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 9. 512.

³⁹ Ibid, 514.

⁴⁰ For the accounts of the written petition detailed by Long see LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 10. 666. For the actual petition sent to Privy Council see LAC RG2 VOL. 676 Reel C-3633.

⁴¹ RG10 C-VI. VOL. Reel 12344. Letterbook 7. 15.

were stationed, locking him in the building until 5 p.m. The two constables that joined Long (he was not sent 20 as requested months before) were assaulted by a gang of men, and several men were eventually arrested and sent to the police station in Cornwall.⁴²

The events that occurred in the election of March 1899 were not a coincidence, but consequences for years of tensions between Long and the community. The relationship between the band and Agent Long was increasingly hostile since his arrival in 1887. Long asserted his authority over the band in various ways and created a policed environment that infringed on the lives of the habitants of the reserve. His obsession of running elections and controlling the band council was merely one reason of many for why his relationship with the band was so hostile. Long imposed constables on the reserve, sold much of the band's lands without consent, and seemed to always be in disagreement with the band on one thing or another. The band protested to him continuously on various issues, however, it was through the election in which their resistance to him was most assertive. While the elections held by Davidson in the early 1880s were somewhat problematic, the community voted non the less. Yet, by 1899 there seem to have been a community consensus over the elections, and a collective resistance was most definitely present in the reserve.

The 1890s mark a transition in the community in which leadership begins to take shape that unites the bandmembers against Agent Long and the government of Canada. The collective and organized resistance that begun to take place in St. Regis is however not isolated and was a movement in tandem with other nations of the Confederacy. This unity and collective resistance within St. Regis and the broader political body of the Confederacy are the topics explored in the next chapter.

⁴² Ibid, 40. The letterbooks holds an account written by one of the constables, and another detailed report written by Long.

Chapter 3

“Rebellious Chiefs”

“There are two of the Chiefs, I think need to be checked in their doings that is John Square and Mitchel Jacob, their principle business for the last year has been to make trouble”
Agent George Long, July 1890.

“To you our Brother, in charge of Indian Affairs, we appeal in our distress to recall your people from our lands” Life Chiefs of St. Regis, 1896

The practice of hereditary chiefs as established by the Peacemaker continued to thrive in the nineteenth-century, and chiefs appointed in the traditional way were called life chiefs. Each Kanien'kehá:ka community selected its own hereditary chiefs, which were chosen by the clan mothers in accordance with the matrilineal practices of the Haudenosaunee. The life chiefs' roles were to govern, protect and care for the well-being of the community. In a petition written by members of the band in December 1896, the life chiefs were described as persons “elected to settle all trouble and dissensions which arise in the Band.”¹ There are few instances in the primary sources in which the roles of the chiefs are described. However, they clearly assert themselves as the governing body of the band through written petitions and interactions with the agents. The life chiefs were representatives of the clans of the band. They were the leaders that made economic and political decisions for the band, and settled disputes in the community, as written in the petition mentioned above. While women and their political roles in St. Regis are entirely absent from the letterbooks, there are a few instances in petitions written by the hereditary chiefs that make their presence known. In St. Regis, twelve life chiefs were selected, two chiefs representing each clan. The hereditary chiefs were chosen for life and perpetuated the

¹ LAC RG2 VOL. 727, Reel C-3653. 8.

Haudenosaunee's centuries long tradition of the Great Law.² They were immensely important figures in the social, political and spiritual practices of the Haudenosaunee nations.

The agents' letters show that the hereditary chiefs, for the most part, were impertinent with the agents. They were, however, present and active in the community throughout the entire twenty-year period, and certain life chiefs had daily contact with the agents. While they are mentioned in the letterbooks, they are rarely identified by their names in the letters from the early and mid 1880s. It is not until the late 1880s, and throughout the 1890s, that the agents begin to frequently mention particular life chiefs by name. They frequently voiced their opposition to the government's impositions on the reserve and the agents' operations, especially on issues such as selling lands or vaccinating the community. The first time life chiefs are identified by name is in a letter written by agent Robert Tyre in the summer of 1884. Tyre wrote that the life chiefs opposed the election of Chief Mitchel Solomon, a predominant figure in the community and a chief elected several times by the state-imposed elections. Chief Solomon is ubiquitous in the letterbooks and held good relations with the majority of the agents. While a

² According to Haudenosaunee tradition, the Confederacy was created by the Peacemaker who sought to bring an end to conflicts and war between the five nations. The story of the Peacemaker and the origin of the Five Nation confederacy, is an incredibly important oral tradition that continues to be told today throughout the various communities and nations of the Confederacy. In the long epic of this oral tradition, the Peacemaker was mysteriously conceived from a young girl who was living in isolation with her mother, who was visited in her dream by a man who foretold her the prophecy of the newly born child. The child grew up fast and, in his youth, began a journey unifying the Five Nations. His journey was extensive and long, and through the aid of a man called Hiawatha, the Peacemaker spread his news of peace throughout the various clans and villages. The Peacemaker presented the nations with the Great Law of Peace, which would ensure peace among people through the creation of a governing system that functioned through kinship and reciprocity. Each nation was given a role within the confederacy, the Kanien'kehá:ka were given the role as the keepers of fire in the Eastern Door, and to the west the Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas were the Keepers of the Western Door, with the heart of the confederacy with its Central Fire located with the Onondaga. Each nation, represented by their clans, would forever appoint a line of hereditary chief to govern and protect, and be presented in the Grand Council. The chiefs were chosen by the clan mothers and were assigned for life. A great white wampum belt (*skanadahkerahkawah*) was weaved to symbolize the coming together of the Five Nations, who were joined together to "work and carry out the principles of the Great Peace" (*kayahnerenhkawah*). See Parker, Arthur C. "The traditional Narrative of the Origin of the Confederation of the Five Nations" Page 98 in *The Constitution of the Five Nations or the Iroquois Book of the Great Law*. (IROQRAFTS Ltd., Ohsweken, Ontario: 1984) for more information.

respected member of the community, Chief Solomon often had conflicts with the life chiefs.³ Throughout the twenty-year period he was elected head chief numerous times. Solomon was voted chief by the community in elections throughout the 1880s, which shows that he had supporters in the band and that he was a predominant leader in the community, regardless of his disputes with the life chiefs.

The following is an illustrative episode. In the summer of 1883, Agent Davidson held a council meeting regarding the repairs of one of the churches on the reserve. Out of 58 members of the band present, 18 voted against the repairs. Davidson wrote, "I would state that the 18 were headed by Mitchel Solomon head Chief, and they consisted principally of relatives of his, who is bound to oppose whatever the life chiefs undertake to do."⁴ This conflict recorded by Davidson shows that the band was divided between those in support of the life chiefs and families who wanted a change of power from the hereditary system. Chief Solomon is an interesting figure who exemplifies how the band was divided between the old system and the newly imposed one. His status as a leader also shows how the interrelations and political dynamics of the band were changing due to the new electoral system. Chief Solomon went on to have issues with the life chiefs in nearly every election he participated in, primarily because he always won, which caused tensions between the two factions in the band, those favouring the hereditary system and those favouring elections.

The life chiefs mentioned by Agent Tyre in 1884 are Chief George Thomas, Chief John Isaac and Chief Alex Thompson. These three men became increasingly involved with the agents

³ There are countless examples in which Solomon complains about the life chiefs or contests their demands. One example concerns an election held in 1886 which Solomon won. Three life chiefs claimed that some of his votes were from underage men and called for a re-election, which Solomon protested in turn. See LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 9. Image 316.

⁴ *Ibid*, 163.

throughout the 1880s and the early 1890s. I believe that they were selected as life chiefs before 1880, and that it was during Davidson's management of the reserve that they became increasingly involved with the affairs of the band. They were active in delegating various issues with the agents, such as distribution of foods and resources, and the repair and maintenance of the schools and churches. Compared to the elected head chief, Chief Solomon, Chief George Thomas, Chief John Isaac and Chief Alex Thompson communicated with the agents on a regular basis. They frequently opposed the agents on various issues. Chief Alexander Thompson in particular seems to exemplify the role of life chief as a steward of the community. Chief Thompson often pressed the agents for distribution of food and blankets to the destitute, or to fix the churches and the schools. He rarely quarrelled with the community or the agents but was rather a quiet and competent man. Chief Thompson is a fascinating figure. He is a constant presence in the letterbooks and was known well by all agents in the twenty-year period. While he passed away in 1895, throughout the 80s and prior to his death he occupied a unique and important leadership role in the community. In 1883, he was arrested and jailed on the American side of the border for cutting timber on the American reserve.⁵ Thompson, with the consent of the American Chiefs, had logged firewood to distribute to bandmembers on the Canadian side, and in the process was arrested by American officials. Agent Davidson had to bail Thompson out and pay his court fees, and in a chain of letters the agent pressed Ottawa to repay him for the

⁵ Lack of timber was an ongoing issue throughout the twenty-year period, and chiefs would often complain that there was no wood left to cut on the reserve lands. The issue of timber scarcity is fascinating and needs more attentive research. There is no academic work in which I could locate that discuss the problems of the lack of resources such as timber in First Nation reservations in the 19th century. I find this an incredibly interesting topic that highlights the importance of research of not only legal and social histories but environmental as well. It makes me wonder on various issues First Nation reserves might have faced regarding the deterioration of natural resources such as game, timber, fish or degradation of soil. The lack of wood on the reserve was a surprise for me to say the least and had forced me to reimagine the landscape of St. Regis, and other Indian reserves, which I had always imagined or visualized as rural communities surrounded by forest and wilderness. This issue of timber painted an entirely different image, a one in which the rural landscape is deprived of forests, not because of mass scale agriculture but due to the cutting of forests for timber and firewood.

money he spent out of pocket helping Thompson. A letter signed by 23 male members of the band was sent by Davidson to Ottawa, showing the band's support of Thompson and agreeing to pay Davidson the \$40 he was owed from the band fund.⁶

Chief Thompson and Chief Solomon were both respected members of the community; however, they were very different types of chiefs. While Solomon sought to change the political foundation and landscape of the band, Thompson's leadership tended to reflect his genuine care and concern for bandmembers' wellbeing. The difference between the two chiefs demonstrates the difference between the hereditary and the electoral governing systems. The former shows political reverence and orthodoxy, while the latter is centred around community care-taking and leadership. It is important to note that Chief Solomon was a respected leader. Chief Solomon shows the issues that could arise from the hereditary system, in which actors in the community seeking leadership roles are denied it. His story shows how the electoral system was beneficial for members of the band who were not chosen to be hereditary leaders and welcomed a new system which changed the system of governance. It is also important to point out that while the elections became acrimonious and caused much tension in the band, they were also welcomed by many who regularly participated in them. It was not until 1890 that the elections became contested and were opposed by the majority of the band. In the 1890s, the life chiefs eventually became the central political body of the band and they were connected to a broader movement of Haudenosaunee sovereignty. In St. Regis in the 1890s, the strengthened leadership of the life chiefs unified the community against the agent, the elections and the impositions of the Canadian government.

⁶ For the file on Chief Thompson's arrest see LAC RG10 VOL 3323 Reel 44586.

The first time that the life chiefs are identified in the primary sources is through their signatures on a petition (by their first Christian names and Kanien'kehá:ka names, signed with an X, see Figure 3) sent in 1895 to the Attorney General's office, in which they specified their individual clans. The list is perplexing and illuminates an ongoing issue I had identifying who the life chiefs were from the evidence in the letterbooks. The list, shown in Figure 3, does not show all the names provided by Agent Tyre in 1884. One possibility regarding the list in Figure 3, which is missing some of the Chiefs mentioned by Tyre, is that the list includes newly chosen chiefs, and also that the list dates a decade after Tyre's letter. A petition dated 1896 written by the Life Chiefs of St. Regis claims that new chiefs were elected in October of 1895 in a meeting held in St. Regis by the Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The petition states: "On that day we elected twelve Life Chiefs, according to the different bands two members of each Band were duly elected, according to the dictates of our Wampum".⁷ This petition from 1896 is important for several reasons. First, the signed list shows that the system of hereditary governance was alive and active in St. Regis. Furthermore, it reinstates and affirmed to the Government of Canada that the hereditary and traditional system of governance was still practiced by the community, regardless of the impositions of the *Indian Act*. This petition also shows that there was a vibrant political caucus at the reserve which was nearly entirely absent from the eyes, or at least the reporting, of the agents. This political body paralleled the elective council of four elected chiefs and seemed to have been operating the affairs of the community

⁷ See LAC RG2 VOL727, Reel C-3653. The file holds 15 different document which are not chronologically ordered. While the archivist labelled the documents 155 a or b etc., there is a mistake in the order of which they are represented. document 4, is not a proceeding one to document 3 but a continuation of a petition written in 1896, which can be found on document 6. The latter document is the petition that states that new life chiefs were selected and gives their names; see figure 3. The petition is titled St. Regis December 9, 1896.

without the approval of the agent. Finally, the twelve life chiefs in St. Regis worked in tandem with the broader political organization of the Confederacy.

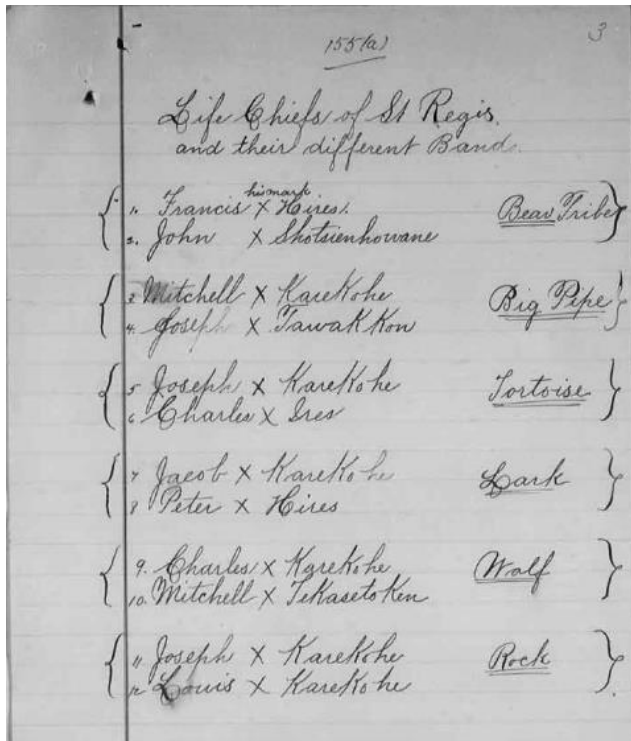


Figure 3: List of the life chiefs of St. Regis and their bands from a petition dated 1894 contesting the laws of the Canadian government regarding the elections of chiefs and other matters. LAC RG2 VOL 727, Reel C-3653.

Identifying life chiefs was an ongoing issue in this research, especially in the period between 1880 and 1890. They were rarely individually named by the agents but were rather referred to as life chiefs. It is possible that some life chiefs participated in elections, and at times were elected chiefs in the election held at the reserve. However, this is my hypothesis, and not something directly stated by the agents. Identifying the life chiefs and distinguishing between them and the elected chiefs was complicated. It is possible that prior to the mid 1890s, several life chiefs were candidates and often elected in the elections. Yet this hypothesis has several issues. The first is that many names are commonly repeated among relatives. For example, there are several Thompsons, Alex's and Alexanders, and Mitchel Jacobs. Furthermore, the agents refers both life chiefs and elective chiefs simply as chiefs, without distinguishing between the two, adding to the

confusion. Finally, while the agent may refer to a man as chief, the records do not show that he had previously participated in an election.

Furthermore, some elected chiefs who were elected one year in an election are identified as life chiefs by the agents a few years later, rather than as elected chiefs. Based on what evidence is available, I hypothesize that during the period between 1880 to 1890, the electoral candidates were often a mixture ambitious bandmembers seeking leadership roles and life chiefs who viewed the election as a means to continue their roles, as they understood them, as chiefs. This ten year period can thus be characterized as a period of adjustment of the community to the elective system, an adjustment that entailed the weaving of the traditional system and the new elections, and an adjustment which eventually escalated disputes within the community. A clear division between the two systems and the community's increasingly unified opposition to the electoral system and support for the life chiefs begins in the mid 1890s.

A similar pattern is shown by Gerald F. Reid in his study of factionalism in Kahnawà:ke during the same time period.⁸ Reid shows how, from 1870 through the 1880s, the community of Kahnawà:ke underwent a political transformation regarding the appointments of chiefs. Reid details how the community was somewhat undecided on whether to proceed with the "old" ways or elect their chiefs for a three-year term.⁹ His research on Kahnawà:ke shows a similar pattern to that in Ahkwesáhsne, in which the community was polarized on the topic of governance. While certain individuals welcomed the electoral system imposed in the *Indian Act*, others were persistent in their desire to maintain the traditional ways. A petition from Kahnawà:ke in 1889 described by Reid¹⁰ (which I also found in the archives) calls for the application of the *Indian*

⁸ Gerald F. Reid. *Kahnawà:ke: Factionalism, Traditionalism and Nationalism in a Mohawk Community*.

⁹ *Ibid*, 53.

¹⁰ LAC RG2 VOL537, Reel C-3399, 4.

Advancement Act on the reserve, and the election of three-year termed chiefs. While Reid shows how Kahnawà:ke was deeply divided by the issue of chiefs, which peaked with the petition written in 1889, Ahkwesáhsne experienced division on the matter in the early 1880s. By 1890, a consensus grew at Ahkwesáhsne and a unity was established regarding the rejection of the elective system and other imposition of the *Indian Act*. It is important to point out the differences between the communities in order to show how circumstantial the governing system was in each community. It was not until the 1910s and 1920s that the Haudenosaunee Confederacy began to act collectively in opposition to the Canadian government, and a movement of sovereignty based on the hereditary traditions began to coalesce.

The hereditary chiefs represent a portion of the community silenced in the letterbooks, a demographic that is distant from the government and their agents. It is interesting to contrast them with the elected chiefs because it is typically the life chiefs and not the elected chiefs who contacted the agents concerning aid or actions necessary for the wellbeing of the band. It was the life chiefs who pressed the agent to give money to destitute members of the community, or requested funds or firewood or general maintenance for the schools. In many ways, they were the protectors of the community and the foothold that ensured that the community was safe and secure. The life chief's leadership took a turn in 1890 when they become increasingly hostile towards the government of Canada and began to proactively protest the agents. A resistance movement formed in St. Regis during this period with the life chiefs at its heart, unifying the community against the impositions of the Canadian state.

Petitions, Resistance and Trouble

The agents recounted events as they understood them, or wished to express them, and therefore their accounts provide a very narrow perspective on what actually transpired. The voices and perspectives of the community are only available in documentary records through the petitions they wrote. Petitions were the primary avenue by which they voiced their concerns and grievances. During the twenty-year period I researched, the band sent countless petitions to Ottawa, but the petitions in the archives only represent a small percentage of the total number written and sent by the community. Petitions are constantly mentioned in the letterbooks, including petitions that the agents claimed to attach in a letter and petitions the agent claimed were written by the band and posted to the Department. In some instances, the petitions were sent to the Department by the agents, yet it is likely that many petitions were also dismissed by the agents and were never sent. In the 1890s the band ceased to send petitions through the agent and instead posted it directly to Ottawa, probably under the assumption that the agents would read and disapprove of them and decline to mail them to their superiors.¹¹

The petitions were sent directly to the Prime Minister, the Governor General of Canada, or even on occasion addressed to the King of England. They often invoked the obligation of the Canadian government or the King of England as agreed upon by treaties and the agreement symbolized by the Wampum belts. For example, in a petition written by the St. Regis Band in 1896 requesting exemption from the elective system, the Band addressed the petition to “His Excellency the Governor General of Canada” and reminded the Governor of the government’s

¹¹ ‘probably’ is an understatement; there were numerous instances in which the chiefs tell the agents they had sent a petition to Ottawa because they did not trust the agents to send it themselves. In other instances, specifically with Agent Long, he wrote to his superiors that the Band had written a petition which he dismissed because it was of no importance. He also reports on a petition sent by him, or directly by the band, which he advises his superiors to ignore.

duty to “defend us when we are in trouble, according to the dictates of our “Treaty.”¹² In another petition written in 1893, the band reminds the Governor General of a treaty signed in 1757 by representatives of England and France and provide a copy of the document from the Colonial history of the State of New York.¹³ They go on to stress past agreements of peace and remind the Governor of the obligations established in the covenant chain.¹⁴

I have been able to locate only a handful of petitions, which date from 1877 to 1899, in the LAC collections. However, evidence from the letterbooks suggests that numerous other petitions were written and sent to Ottawa. My research suggests that between half a dozen and a dozen petitions were written each year by various members of the band. The absence of the petitions in the archives is disheartening to the extent that it suggests Ottawa’s indifference to the grievances voiced therein. The fact that so many petitions are missing from the RG2 and RG10 collections paints a worrisome picture. Perhaps the agents never mailed them, or perhaps they disposed of them. Another possibility is that the clerks in Ottawa chose to ignore them or not administer them, demonstrating their disregard to the grievances and concerns of Indigenous peoples. It is also possible that the petitions have not been digitized or labelled and archived in a clear way, and are tucked away between documents and folders in the LAC. The petitions are important because they are one of the few remaining primary documentary sources that give first-hand accounts from Indigenous people, unfiltered by the government or the agents. Furthermore, the petitions often voiced issues that the agent chose to ignore and which are therefore absent from the letterbooks.

¹² LAC RG2 VOL 727, Reel C-3653.

¹³ It was not entirely clear from the petition what the Colonial History of the State of New York was. However, it seemed to have been a type of archive or institution because they presented a copy of the 1757 treaty, which they claimed came from the “Colonial History of the State of New York.” It is also possible that they mean that the treaty was from the colonial history of New York. LAC RG2 VOL 727, Reel C-3653.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

The petitions were a way for the First Nations to voice their grievances, complaints or concerns and seek resolutions for their problems. Their contents show that the Bandmembers understood themselves as sovereign political bodies, not Canadians but members of the broader political body of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Kanien'kehá:ka nation. In nearly every single petition the petitioners identify themselves as “we the Indians of the Seven Nations of Iroquois of St. Regis.”¹⁵ The petitions often contrast the “White men” and “Indians” and make a clear distinction between the two. They make frequent reference to the Two Row Wampum belt and its metaphor of the two parallel vessels, the ship and the canoe, representing two societies and their parallel laws and customs.¹⁶ Furthermore, the petitions demonstrate the band’s mistrust of the agents and their wish to bypass them by writing directly to their superiors. The petitions varied in subject matter; however, they all have one thing in common, which is that they were written with the aim of reaching officials in Ottawa. There were many instances in which a disagreement occurred between the agents and the band, following which the band decided to send a complaint directly to Ottawa, believing that their requests would be fulfilled. At other times, the petitions were written with the blessing of the agents, and sometimes even transcribed by the agents themselves. For example, in 1882, Davidson wrote a petition regarding the construction of a school with a Mohawk teacher on behalf of the band.¹⁷ At other times the agents seemed unaware of petitions sent to Ottawa, such as a petition sent by the band to remove Davidson from his post in 1879¹⁸ or a complaint against Agent Long sent by the chiefs in 1890.¹⁹ The petitions discuss a variety of topics, from inter-community disputes, such as requests for re-

¹⁵ The Seven Nations of Iroquois were Indigenous nations allied with the French. The nations include communities at Lorette, Wolinak, Odanak, Kahnawake, Kanasetake, Akwesasne and La Présentation.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, documents 6 and 3.

¹⁷ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 8. Image 70.

¹⁸ LAC RG10 VOL. 2080. Reel C-11152

¹⁹ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. Reel T-11955, Letterbook 9. Image 421.

elections of chiefs, to issues concerning land and lot divisions, objections to the presence of police constables on the reserve, the construction of a railway, complaints regarding the agents, or appeals for new schools and churches. However, the most striking petitions are those written in the 1890s. They show a blatant disregard and mistrust in Agent Long, and the desire of the band to manage their own affairs.

A series of petitions sent between 1894 to 1897 show the band's growing frustration and increasing desire to resist and oppose the government of Canada. These petitions also exhibit the growing nationalist sentiment of the Haudenosaunee nationalist movement, at the heart of which was the community of St. Regis. A petition dated September 22, 1894 states:

The time has come when we wish to inform you of the "Renewal of our Laws and Customs". We have been polishing the laws on our wampum and the rights of our Treaty and our agreement with the Government. We do throw off from us all other laws which have brought us troubles of every shape and description, we have seen that such laws are not for us so we return to our own laws. We put our own laws over every other for our own benefit.²⁰

The petitioners go on to explain that new life chiefs were chosen a year prior, with the presence of delegates from Kahnawà:ke. They explain that the laws of the "White man" and the "Indian Brave" will walk side by side, but never mingle, a reference of the Two Row Wampum. This petition is the first of many exhibiting a growing discontent and, more specifically, assertion for self-determination and sovereignty. The petitions of 1894 to 1897 indicate the formation of a consensus in St. Regis regarding the governing of the community, as well as a sense of inter-communal comradery and unity. They show a unified resistance to the Canadian government among the members of the St. Regis bands, and an alliances with other communities within the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Kanien'kehá:ka nation.

²⁰ LAC RG2 VOL 727, Reel C-3653.

While the petitions are historically monumental and truly exciting sources to engage with, they also exhibit a sad reality; the community's pleas were rarely answered, and as the years passed the tone of the petitions grew more desperate. The petitions were perhaps the most peaceful and respectable way in which the band could reach Ottawa and be heard; however, they were more than often ignored. They reflect the growing understanding of the people of Ahkwesáhsne that the Canadian government did not honour the duties and promises it made in treaties signed with the Haudenosaunee people. They show a somber reality dawning over the community: they could not expect fair treatment and respect from Ottawa. For example, in a petition written in 1895, the life chiefs write: "by the actions of the Canadian government that the Indians are looked upon as minors and treat them as such for it is plainly to be seen that the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs has the full power to control and management of the lands and property of the Indians in Canada."²¹ This petition was signed by over 80 members of the community and was one of the few instances in which Ottawa took notice of their requests. In months following the petition, a representative from the DIA visited the reserve and returned to Ottawa informing the Department of their requests to abolish elections and return to their traditional governing body. This petition and their requests were presented to the Privy Council, who then decided it was not in the "best interest of the Indians that the hereditary system continue," and with that the matter was settled. The petitions show a perspective which is absent from the letterbooks. The community felt increasingly unsafe due to the growing presence of constables on the reserve. They were frustrated with the agents for selling their lands and enraged that the Canadian government, without the consent of the band, was building railways that passed through the reserve. Most of these issues were omitted or downplayed in the

²¹ LAC RG2 VOL 676, Reel C-3633.

correspondence of the agents with DIA, and without the petitions it would be impossible to know the community's oppositions.

Throughout the entire twenty-year period, the Band protested and defied the agents in various ways. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these collective movements were a clear reaction to decisions made and actions taken by the agents and, not only in regard to the elections. The issues most strongly fought were regarding land sales and leases, vaccination and the children's attendance to school. There were numerous instances in the twenty-year period I researched in which, after several petitions were sent and ignored, the chiefs decided to take matters into their own hands and shift their methods of resistance. These methods of opposition and resistance took on myriad forms, and by the mid-to-late 1890s these episodes of resistance became increasingly aggressive, confrontational and collectively organized.

One way in which the chiefs rebelled was by leasing, selling or at times even occupying lands without the permission of the agents.²² Beginning during the tenure of Agent Tyre and continuing during those of Agent Baker and later Agent Long, the chiefs began to manage the reserve land on their own. As a result, the agents did not collect commissions from land leases as they usually did, and they were accordingly infuriated. In some cases, the chiefs would relocate to and physically inhabit the land in question, but in most cases, they would sell the land or lease it of their own accord, bypassing the official approval of the agents. The most provocative way to contravene the agents' authority was through controlling the leasing of lands. However, this had consequences; the chiefs were often removed by the agents, as mentioned in Chapter 2. For

²² The *Indian Act* gave the federal government and the DIA control over the management of Indian lands, properties and all Indian funds (the money made from lease and sales of lands). The *Act* consolidated various past legislations that outlined the validation of the surrender of Indian lands, which could only be surrendered by a consensus agreement of the chiefs and council of a band. While the governing body of the band had to agree to a surrender, only DIA representatives could manage sales and leases. In 1894, the regulation of the management of land was amended and gave the DIA permission to sell or lease Indian lands which had not been surrendered, i.e. without the consent of the Band council and the chiefs.

example, in 1887, during the management of temporary agent D. Baker, elected (and possibly also life chiefs) Chief Thompson, Chief Lazar and Chief Isaac took possession of an Island belonging to the reserve and leased it out for a substantial sum of money.²³ Agent Baker warned the chiefs that “there will be serious consequences” and that their leasing of the islands was illegal. Baker did not stay at the agency long enough to see the chiefs “bear the consequences of their actions.” But the following year, under the supervision of Agent Long, three chiefs were disposed of for a similar reason. A few years later, in 1893, the elected chiefs leased several islands of reserve territory, enraging Agent Long, who disposed of their chiefship and called for a re-election. The community was well aware that the agents made commissions from the lease and sale of reserve lands. In several band council meeting they complained to the agents that this money should be given directly to the band, and not handled by the Department, who they claimed was stealing their money.²⁴

The Department continued to ignore the band’s appeals, and eventually the chiefs responded by sending a convoy to Ottawa to plead their case. This happened several times during the twenty-year period and seemed to be a somewhat effective strategy for capturing Ottawa’s attention. In one instance, in the spring of 1886 during Agent Baker’s tenure as agent, a delegation of chiefs from the American and Canadian side of the reserve traveled to Ottawa to present an agreement they had reached regarding logging on the reserve and nearby lands. There were continuous tensions between the American and Canadian sides of St. Regis due to the scarcity of wood available to log on reserve territory. The tensions were caused when members of the Canadian side, where there was no more available timber, cut firewood from the American side. On one occasion (retold earlier in this chapter) Chief Thompson from the Canadian reserve

²³ LAC RG10 VOL. C-VI. T-11955, Letterbook 9. 345.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 437.

was arrested and charged American police, and the issue was brought to the New York State courts.

In 1886, the case of Chief Thompson illegally logging on the American reserve was repealed and sent to a higher court, which was set for trial the following summer. The community called a meeting of the two bands and invited representatives from Kahnawà:ke to find a resolution for the issue. The council was held and came to a successful agreement between the American and Canadian sides, who then sent a collective delegation to Ottawa to present their agreement.²⁵ This delegation caused such a ruckus that Agent Tyre was reprimanded by his superiors, who were not pleased with the convoy's arrival in Ottawa. In a letter defending his position, Agent Tyre wrote that he "did all in his power to prevent the chiefs from going to Ottawa." He told them that the Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, was sick and could not see them. The chief replied that they did not believe him and, using their own money, (without the approval of the agent they could not have access to the band fund) made their way to Ottawa.²⁶

The DIA continued to ignore their demands, and the band's relations with the agents grew increasingly hostile. In response, by the 1890s, the community started to exercise a more unified, organized and aggressive method of resistance and disobedience. Elections became the central, unifying issue in the community. Opposition to the elections was a vehicle to show their discontentment with the Canadian government, and thus the elections became problematic for Agent Long. As the band's resistance to elections grew, Long responded with increasing hostility. He would resort to the use of police violence, or legal mechanism like removing chiefs from their roles, banning members from the band, restricting band funds or imprisoning members. Long was steadfast in his desire to show his and the government's authority over

²⁵ *Ibid*, 303.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 306.

Indigenous people and did everything in his power to suppress their resistance and weed out the leaders he believed were in charge.

During the period of heightened resistance in the late 1890s, there were numerous amendments to the *Indian Act* that reflect on the government's desire to suppress resistance. For example, an amendment made in 1894 increased the powers of the Indian agents and granted the Superintendent General the authority to stop the distribution of annuities. It also permitted constables to arrest and detain a status Indian without a warrant.²⁷ One amendment made school attendance compulsory, while another repealed Section 38 of the *Indian Act*, which concerned the surrender of lands by band consensus. This amendment gave the DIA the power to sell and lease Indian lands without surrender, i.e. without the band council and chiefs' consent. An amendment in 1898 modified the electoral system by decreasing the number of chiefs which represented a given population. A statement provided by a Department secretary stated that "some bands are thereby given altogether too many chiefs and councillors."²⁸ The government wanted to limit self-governing bodies of First Nations. They believed that, by limiting and decreasing the size of band councils, they would face less opposition on reserves, and reserves would be easier to manage and control.

Jake Ice and the Elections of 1899

The escalating tension and hostility during the twenty-year period of 1880-1900 reached their peak during the election of 1899. Agent Long and the police were confronted by some 200 protestors and, according to the letterbooks, Long was locked in the poll house for the afternoon. However, there is a second part of the story known by elders in Ahkwesáhsne and the local

²⁷ Leslie, John. Ron Maguire, and Robert G. Moore. *The Historical Development of the Indian Act*. 97.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 103.

historian Darren Bonaparte which is much more sinister than what Agent Long depicts in the letterbooks. According to the community, the election of March 1899 was followed by a tragedy. Agent Long, infuriated at the protestors and at having been (briefly) imprisoned, sought to punish the men whom he believed were responsible for the disturbance. He gathered two policemen from Cornwall and arrested several men at their homes. Agent Long summoned a man named Chief Jake Fire (also known as Chief Ohnehtotako) to his office. Upon his arrival at Long's office, he noticed that two of his fellow chiefs were in custody, and he cried out to warn the other men in the village. His cry was heard by his brother John Fire, (Saiowisakeron, also known as Jake Ice) who immediately came to their aid, bursting into Long's office. A fight ensued, and one of the policemen, Officer Sherwood, shot John Fire, instantly killing him. The rest of the chiefs were taken into police custody and spent a year in the Beauharnois jail.²⁹

The community of Ahkwesáhsne tells the story to this day at community gatherings in the Longhouse and their school. However, this story is entirely absent from the letterbooks. Judging from the administrative records, it is as if this event never occurred. This issue is perplexing. Why didn't Agent Long record this event? The event clearly escalated beyond the control of the federal officials who were present and was an extremely noteworthy episode. While the RG10 and RG2 collections have no archival memory of such a disturbance, other sources, besides those of the community, do. An article published in the *New York Times* on May 2, 1899 states:

“MONTREAL May 1 – As a result of an expedition of the Dominion police against the obstreperous Indians at St. Regis today, one Indian was killed and two seriously wounded, and four arrested. The dead man is Jake Ice, a very bad Indian, who had been accused of killing his wife....It appears that police arrived by tug from Cornwall and immediately went to the house of the men, who were charged with preventing the holding of elections on the reservation. When they had arrested their men they took them to the house of the Indian Agent. A crowd to the number of 200, including a

²⁹ This account of the story is as told by the Ahkwesáhsne elders and written by the Ahkwesáhsne historian Darren Bonaparte. See “ Saiowisakeron: The Jake Ice Story” in *The Wampum Chronicles* <http://www.wampumchronicles.com/saiowisakeron.html>

number of American Indians, surrounded the place and shouted for the release of their friends”³⁰

Another article was published in the *Washington Post* on May 2, 1899, with the headline “Battle with Indians.”³¹ An article published on the same day in *The Globe* under the headline “One Indian Shot Dead, Shocking Outcome of the St. Regis Reservation Tribal Troubles and the Arrest of Disobedient Chiefs” goes on to tell of the event in great detail, explaining that “It does not appear that the Indians offered any violence to the officers but the latter seem to have considered the intrusion of the Indians a hostile demonstration, and immediately pulled their revolvers and five shots were fired”.³² These newspaper articles are important because they present the nuance of the situation, which is not presented by Agent Long in the letterbook. The articles show some support for the men arrested, by indicating that their arrest was not based on aggression or violence, but rather on opposition to the agency.

The lack of DIA correspondence on this event is truly disconcerting. Since the event undoubtedly happened, given the oral history and newspaper records, and because the letterbooks are otherwise thorough about nearly all other reserve matters, it seems overwhelmingly likely that the DIA attempted to suppress the record of the event. Nowhere in the letterbook between March 1899 to May 1899 does Long mention the need to arrest organizers of the resistance, nor does he report their arrest. This issue presents two possibilities. The first is that Agent Long, enraged and humiliated by the events that took place, sought revenge by collaborating with police to arrest the men he felt were responsible for the contested

³⁰ “Canadian Indian Killed: Dominion Police in an Encounter with Malcontents at St. Regis” *New York Times*, May, 2, 1899. <https://www-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/docview/95676975/7A98DC2A5C57451BPQ/2?accountid=10246> (Accessed Sep. 4, 2022)

³¹ “Battle with Indians: Canadian Officers Kill One and Seriously Wound Two at St. Regis” *The Washington Post*, May 2, 1899. <https://www-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/docview/144056334/7A98DC2A5C57451BPQ/4?accountid=10246> (Accessed Sep. 4, 2022)

³² Special Dispatched to The Globe, “One Indian Shot Dead: Shocking Outcome of the St. Regis Reservation.” *The Globe*, May 2, 1899.

election, doing so on his own according without consent from his superiors in Ottawa. While Agent Long was resolute on exhibiting his authority over the community, it seems unlikely to me that he would take such drastic measures without consent from Ottawa. The second hypothesis, which seems more likely, is that Agent Long reported the events to his superiors in Ottawa, who ordered him not to copy his report in the letterbooks, thus erasing it from the Department's administrative memory. I believe he was advised to leave the RCMP officers responsible for the report, which would then be administered by the RCMP, and hence unavailable for public viewing.³³ However, the incident was not entirely silenced, and it was thoroughly reported by numerous newspapers. One article published in *The Globe* on May 3, 1899 gives an account of the Colonel responsible for the shooting. The article mentions Agent Long as well, and provides a statement from a DIA representative. The representative, Mr. McCrae, blamed a lack of action taken by Department delegates a decade before. He also claimed that the "Indians wanted a little republic of their own" and that "there is no truth in the story that the St. Regis trouble is the result of the Government's interfering in their election" but rather that the "Indians declined long ago to recognize the common law".³⁴

The killing of Jake Ice by the RCMP at Agent Long's office symbolizes a turn of events for the people of Ahkwesáhsne and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, as well as a turning point for the government of Canada and their Indian agents. Police presence on reserves and state violence would become normalized throughout reserves across Canada, and especially in Haudenosaunee communities in the first few decades of the twentieth century (and later ones

³³ Files concerning RCMP raids at St. Regis and other Indian Reserves are restricted under the *Access to Information Act* and require official requests that need to be approved by a court order, a process that requires resources unavailable to me. The requests, if accepted by a court order, can then take years to process, a time frame I simply do not have at my disposal for this research.

³⁴ Special Dispatched to *The Globe*, "St. Regis Affray: Col. Sherwood's Statement as to Shooting of Ice." *The Globe*, May 3, 1899. <https://www-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/docview/1649971979/BE0F1084269B4375PQ/11?accountid=10246> (Accessed Sep. 4, 2022)

too). The event that took place in Agent Long's office would grow to become an acceptable way of which the government suppressed resistance and disobedience in Haudenosaunee reserves, and state-imposed violence would become a daily reality for the people living in reserves. Agent Long and his unyielding need to regulate, manage and control the people of St. Regis using any means possible, reflects on a much broader culture of governmentality, in which the "Indians" were not only seen as "savages" to be "civilized" but as offenders to be dealt with through policing and violence. Yet state violence is rarely met without opposition, and the increasing violence experienced by the Haudenosaunee of the state intensified their desire to resist, which eventually grew into the pan-Indianism and First Nation sovereignty movements that empowered the Haudenosaunee and other First Nations throughout North America.

By the 1920s, the RCMP raided Haudenosaunee communities, such as the Six Nations Reserve and Kahnawà:ke, on a regular basis, and the government would go to extremes to prevent the Haudenosaunee and other First Nations from resisting. Besides the now-common police raids on Indigenous communities, the government made continuous amendments to the *Indian Act* with the aim of diminishing any collective resistance and individual liberty of status Indians. One such amendment prohibited tribal festivals, gatherings and dances. In 1906, under the DIA leadership of Deputy Superintendent General Frank Pedley, amendments included provisions regarding the management of Indian funds.³⁵ The amendments passed during the early

³⁵ An amendment to the management and sales of Indian lands in 1906 made major cuts to the proportion of proceeds from lands sales which were given to the band. A further amendment in 1924 took nearly all decision-making power regarding the sale of lands from the band's authority, giving the agents and Ottawa complete authority over the sale of lands. In a House of Council debate on June 30, 1924, Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior, said: "This we find, in practice, is very little inducement to them to deal with their lands and we find that there is a very considerable difficulty in securing their assent to any surrender. Some weeks ago, when the House was considering the estimates of the Indian Department, it was brought to the attention of the House by several members, especially from the Northwest that there was a great and pressing need of effort being made to secure the utilization of the large areas of land held by Indians in their reserves without these reserves being of any value to the Indians and being a detriment to the settlers and to the prosperity and progress of the surrounding country." See *The Historical Development of the Indian Act*. Page 103.

decades of the twentieth century grew increasingly draconian, and by the 1920s went so far as prohibiting lawyers from representing Indian status persons or bands in court, which effectively restricted First Nations peoples' right to be lawfully represented in the Justice System. This prohibition, passed as a legislation in 1924, arose specifically from Haudenosaunee communities (St. Regis, Kanasatake, and Oneida reservation) who had hired an American lawyer, George Decker, to represent them in court and advise them on various issues.³⁶ The clause restricting access to legal representation was not repealed until the 1950s.

State violence, however, did not cease in the first decades of the twentieth century and would become increasingly normalized thereafter. This trend—using state power to suppress Indigenous resistance, and hiding it from the public eye and official records—would become an essential component to this normalization. This period of the nineteenth-century administrative development, described by Michel Foucault as governmentality, entails the development of the state into a mechanism of power over which no authority supersedes. Increased state authority over the lives of First Nations peoples amplified in the twentieth century, and the use of the RCMP on reserves only exacerbated. First Nations peoples in Canada were governed differently from settler-citizens. They were not viewed as citizen but as wards of the state and lacked the basic rights such as owning land, or voting, that a Canadian citizen had. This special treatment of status Indians by the federal government and its authorities was undoubtedly met with steadfast resistance in reserves across Canada, not only in Ahkwesáhsne. The incident of Jake Ice and Agent Long and the RCMP silencing of the event should bring into question the operations of the

³⁶ In 1921 the Haudenosaunee Confederacy hired the American lawyer George Decker to consult the Confederacy on tribal rights, assist them in securing such rights, and lay objections against enforcement of citizenship. Decker had worked previously with the Seneca nation in the United States securing their hunting and fishing rights. He won the famous 1920 case *United States vs Boylan*, which obtained federal recognition of Oneida tribe in New York. For the detail of Decker see Lawrence Hauptman “*Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership*” 128. For more information on the amendment prohibiting lawyers see *The Historical Development of the Indian Act* page 120.

DIA in reserves across Canada. I believe that similar stories of resistance and activism are yet to be uncovered in First Nations communities throughout Canada. Administrative memory may have erased these movements and hide them from public memory, but First Nations communities continue to share them today—and if we listen close enough we can hear them in the smallest detail.

Conclusion

A peaceful election finally took place in St. Regis following the confrontation and the unrests of the elections held in March 1899. Under the surveillance of a DIA official Mr. McCrae on June 1899, twelve chiefs were elected. After the community voted they refused to leave the council house during the counting of the vote, proclaiming that they will not leave the meeting until the government representative announced the nominated men life chiefs. The community was under the assumption that the men elected were chiefs elected for life, not a three-year term, and during the meeting the band insisted that Mr. McCrae approved their terms. They left the council house cheering over their victory, celebrating the selection of their life chiefs. The reporter on the scene had realized there was a misunderstanding and approached the government official to confirm, asking him if the chiefs were elected for life. The official then said, “for three years only” a man nearby heard this answer and immediately called the rest of the band who surrounded the official, who then declared that he will return in three years time for a new election.¹

There are several particularities to point out about this election. First and foremost, the election shows that the community, after nearly a decade of activism and advocacy concerning their elections, were able to achieve a somewhat respectable goal of electing their chiefs in accordance to their own system. The election, although called an election, was presupposed on 12 candidates who did not compete for the chiefship but were leaders chosen by the community. While the selection of the 12 chiefs does not entirely correspond with the “old way” of selection of hereditary chiefs, it is nonetheless a system of governing and election of leaders that was

¹ Special Dispatch to The Globe, “Chiefs Elected: Twelve Men Chosen Unanimously at St. Regis Indian Sadly Disappointed When They Found the Elections Good for Three Years.” *The Globe*, June 22, 1899. <https://www-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/docview/1649978920/BE0F1084269B4375PQ/5?accountid=10246> (Accessed Sep. 4, 2022)

formulated on a collective consensus, rather than Canadian law. The elections imposed by the *Indian Act*, in which St. Regis had previously practiced, was for one head chief and three second chiefs, not 12 chiefs. Thus, for the eyes of the community this was a significant achievement and a minor defeat for the federal government. However, the government does not capitulate so easily, and as the reporter pointed out at the end of the meeting, the election, although for twelve not four chiefs, are not for life but a three-year term. This settlement between the community and the federal government, while not entirely satisfactory, shows the strength of the community's collective organization and decades long resistance.

This election settlement is significant and important. It is perhaps one of the first times in post-Confederation history in which First Nations people were able to negotiate self-determined terms of governing themselves. Although it is a long way from self-government or sovereignty it is none the less extremely significant in that it opened a chapter in federal and Native Peoples history in which negotiation became possible.² A notion that a decade prior seemed extremely unlikely. The settlement of this election is significant in which it shows that the federal government recognized the band of St. Regis as a political entity, an entity entitled to negotiate a settlement and agreement with the government. Furthermore, it signifies the beginning of the making of Native governing bodies as a hybrid of a federal, or Western systems and traditional ones. While still under the control and hegemony of the federal government, this space of negotiation paved the way towards a movement of self-determination, in which First Nations are recognized political entities separate from the federal government.³

² Although, by the 1920s Duncan Campbell Scott slammed the door on these kinds of negotiations.

³ While politics of recognition are policies enforced in the 1960s in Canadian politics, the foundation for the framework of federal and First Nation negotiations can be traced to this settlement mentioned above. It is essential for me to point out that the framework of these negotiation and policies of recognition and reconciliation are by no means ideal and are contested by contemporary scholars. Indigenous academics such as Audra Simpson and Glenn Coulthard criticize politics of recognition and argue that liberal politics, regarding Indigenous nationhood and governance are issues that perpetuated and reinforced the colonial systems of inequalities and oppression, and work

Another particularity of this election worth mentioning is that Agent Long seemed to have been entirely absent from this election, and the negotiations that led to this election's settlement. While the article mentions his name in passing, there is no record of this election or its negotiation in the letterbooks. Long's reporting changed following the election of the March 1899, and the event of the arrest of the chiefs and the killing of Jake Ice. His reporting became shorter and lacking details, unlike the pages long letters and reports he wrote years prior. While Agent Long's relationship with the community was always hostile, the events of the spring and summer of 1899 had shifted his attitude, it seems. The letterbook show that following the events of 1899 he was less involved with issues regarding the elections, and other matters in the community as well. The focus of most of his reporting following 1899 concerned general accounting and not much else. Perhaps the events and the community's growing hostilities towards Long had changed his approach to the agency, however this is just my hypothesis and there is no written letter that I found that details Long's feelings on the matter. Agent Long continued to serve at the St. Regis agency until 1911, making him the longest serving agent at St Regis.

Agent Long showed nothing short of animosity towards the community in which he was paid to live among and manage. He was good at his job and he profited greatly from the commissions of sales and leases of the reserve's lands, which were contested by the band. He, along with Agent Davidson, Agent Tyre and Agent Baker, were a product of the bureaucratic and settler culture in which they belonged: a bureaucratic culture that sought to diminish the

as a self-serving framework that ensures the prosperity of the settler state. The system of recognition, and its criteria is inherently a settler colonial system, which sets its own guidelines of what entails recognition, or even the framework and limitation of any Indigenous affairs such as self-determination (that would not be necessary to obtain if such nations were sovereign), resource extraction or education. The reality in Ahkwesáhsne in 1899, which remains so today, is that the Canadian government denies the nationhood of the Haudenosaunee and its desires to be a sovereign nation. See Coulthard, Glenn Sean. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2014). 17. And Audra Simpson. *Mohawk Interruptus*.

existence of Indigenous peoples, undoubtedly looking upon them in a discriminatory and repulsive way while exploiting their resources and lands. The Department's administrative system and bureaucratic culture encouraged the self-serving dictatorial behaviour of the agents. Their roles as agents required them to assert authority over Indigenous peoples, in which they were indoctrinated to believe were a race to be disdained, and people who were not citizens but wards of the state. While all agents stationed at the St. Regis agency exhibited a similar behaviour and work ethics, Agent's Long time as agent highlights a transitional period in the DIA. During Long's time at the agency certain changes occurred. Police became more present at the reserve, there was an increase of individuals jailed and placed in insane asylums. While laws were enforced that made the leasing and selling of land much easier for the Department. Long's decades long service at the agency illuminate the solidification of the formation of the administrative systems of the DIA and the professionalization of its employees. But most important: these decades of his years of service were essential periods in the ideological development of the methodology of governing and controlling Indigenous peoples.

The twenty-year period in which this research concentrated was a crucial period in the development of the DIA and the federal government relationship to First Nation peoples. The bureaucratic and administrative development of the DIA was shaped by the resistance it met in reserves and by status Indians throughout Canada. Not only were the administrative processes and bureaucratic system solidified during this period, so was the legal mechanism used to validate the control over Indigenous people. Between 1880 and 1900 countless amendments were made to the *Indian Act* increasing the power and jurisdiction of the DIA and the federal government over status Indians and Indian lands. Some examples of amendments made to the *Act* include: amendments made in 1894 which increased the power of the Indian agents and gave

the Department the ability to stop distribution of annuities, permitting the arrest of Indian status persons without a warrant, and gave power to the DIA to sell and lease reserve lands without the consent of the band. Further amendments in 1898 decreased the number of elective chiefs and the band council. While in 1906 the *Indian Act* was amended to prohibit tribal gatherings and dances and increased the control over the management of Indian funds.⁴ By the 1920s under Duncan Campbell Scott's tenure as the Superintendent General the amendments became more draconian. They included prohibiting lawyers from representing Indian status persons in court, as well as enforcing, by any means necessary, the attendance of children ages 7 to 15 to school.⁵

While the resistance and activism of the St. Regis band was not entirely responsible for the amendments and development of the DIA, there are various changes made to the *Indian Act* and the Department's operations which correspond to predominant issues at the reserve. For example, one of the ongoing disputes between the Band and the DIA and the agents, were regarding land sales, leases and the management of resources. By the mid 1890s in which the band had been actively protesting the selling of their lands for over a decade, an amendment passed in 1894 permitted the Superintendent General and his agents to lease or sale reserve lands, without the surrender of lands or approval of a band.⁶ This amendment was a solution to the issues continuously experienced by the agents who struggle to get the band's approval for leasing of lands, as well as a solution for the federal government to make more land easily available to the growing settler population.

⁴ For the amendments made to the Indian Act from 1894 to 1906 see Kahn-Tineta Miller "*The Historical Development of the Indian Act*" 97 to 107.

⁵ In 1898 amendment was made making schooling compulsory for Indigenous children, however the changes made by Scott in his enfranchisement plans included giving the agents and RCMP officers the ability to forcefully bring children to schools. For amendments made to the *Act* and the DIA see *Ibid*, 103-120 and for information on Duncan Campbell Scott and his enfranchisement plans see Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision*, pages 87-120.

⁶ Kahn-Tineta Miller "*The Historical Development of the Indian Act*" 97.

Many of the amendments mentioned above correspond directly to issues the agents experienced at St. Regis. From the chiefs protesting the attendance of children to schools, objections to smallpox vaccination, and the continuous oppositions to the selling and leasing of their lands. Thus, the DIA and its operations and legal apparatus was continuously changing according to the various resistance it was met with at reserves. Yet the more draconian and overpowering the DIA became, the more unified, organized and resilient was the community of Ahkwesáhsne. Shown through the years of Agent Long's position at the agency and the continuous protests and resistance he was met with. As the agents grew more obstinate and likely to use police powers, the more resilient and coalesced was the Band's reactions. The increasing use of state violence to dominate and control the people on reserves only intensified in the following decades of the twentieth century. Haudenosaunee communities experienced increasingly violent RCMP raids well into the 1920s.⁷ The friction between the federal government and the Haudenosaunee begun in the decades of which this research concentrates, and it is therefore an important time to historically examine.

This pattern of state power and racism, and the resistance to state domination in which I have identified above, resonates, above all, in the work of Michel Foucault in his analysis of the history of the state and the creation of its institutions which he calls governmentality. Foucault explains that the formation of the state came about by continuous opposition from its subjects, and a mechanism created through the process of "establishing its own legitimacy by making itself stronger".⁸ Broadly summarizing Foucault's complex analysis; the state's function was that

⁷ Tensions rose at the Six Nation reserve, and by 1922 The Royal Canadian Mounted Police invaded Grand River and established a permanent military presence in the reserve. Additional issues rose during this time, as the Canadian government increased the presence of the Canadian Indian Department in Haudenosaunee communities, and continued a gradual annexation of their treaty agreed lands. See Laurence Hauptman M. *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership; the Six Nation since 1800*. 127. And also Audra Simpson in *Mohawk Interruptus*. 136.

⁸ Foucault, Michel. "*Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76*" trans. David Macey. ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador Press, 2003), 224.

of domination and control which transpires through technologies and mechanism of governmentality; hence the categorization of human behaviour and conditions through scientific discourses which emerges (more or less) in biopower. Biopower is a significant development of the late nineteenth-century in which he explains as a “power’s hold over life” or the state’s control of the body and society as a whole. This control is aimed at normalizing society not only via the discipline and punishment of certain behaviour (such as insanity or sexuality) but by eliminating altogether undesirable race (to the West). For Foucault racism lays at the heart of the biopower system and is its precondition. Biopower manifested in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as “State racism of a biological and centralized racism.”⁹ The development of the State mechanism and its governmentality, through the formulation of biopower and centralized racism is all too apparent in the history of the DIA and its operation in Ahkwesáhsne and throughout Canada during the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries. To me, it is crucial to understand the struggles Indigenous peoples faced through a Foucauldian lens, hence as intentional institutional operations centred on racist ideologies. The aim for the federal government, was as Foucault claims, was (and arguably still is) to control and dominate; resulting in the rejection, expulsion, political death and at times killing, of Indigenous people.

The opposition towards the state and its oppressive laws and regulations intensified in St. Regis from 1880 to 1900. It is through the elections in which that opposition took hold and became collectively organized resistance. While tensions and issues regarding the elections and hereditary governing bodies were present in the community in the 1880s, by the mid 1890s it

⁹ He does not claim that racism is a product of the 19th and 20th centuries rather that it is a backbone to the creation of the modern state and its power and domination over people: “The racism that came into being as a transformation of and an alternative to revolutionary discourse, or the old discourse of race struggle, underwent two further transformations in the 20th century. At the end of the 19th century, we see the appearance of what might be called State racism of a biological and centralized racism.” See *Ibid*, 82.

became clear that a unified governing body had taken hold in the reserve. Thomas Stone, a historian who wrote about Ahkwesáhsne in the 1880s and 1890s, claims that the community lacked effective intercommunity authority, and as a response sought the involvement of external authority in their affairs.¹⁰ However, my research showed otherwise. While disputes between members were common, as in nearly any community, St. Regis's collective mobilization through the leadership of the life chiefs is definite. The leadership of the life chiefs and the community's eager desire to remain with their traditional governing systems, was at the heart of their resistance. Furthermore, it is their desire to continue living by their own governance and traditional bodies that propelled the sovereignty and nationalist movement of the Haudenosaunee in the decades following the period of this study. Finally, my research shows that contrary to Stone's claims, the eras of the 1880s and 1890s show the community's utter disapproval and mistrust of the federal government, or "external state authority."

The majority of this research was spent reading the thoughts, opinions and feelings of the agents and I tried to remain as objective as possible to their actions. Even if at times it seemed intolerable to remain objective, I understood that they too were pawns in a game. The agents were men who just like all of us had to make some living in an ever-changing world, and their jobs were challenging. It was vital for me to see the agents as labourers in a system of class and privilege and that authority loomed over them as well. Finally, while my aim in this research was to uncover the history of the Department of Indian Affairs and the operation of its agents in a reserve, it became apparent that this research could not be told without the telling the story of the

¹⁰ In his article Stone writes: "at the end of the decade there was an attempt to re-establish the system of life chiefs on the Canadian side of the boundary; in the meantime there remained an elective council" (page 179) He goes on to say "it seems fair to conclude that the DIA was being mobilized in these cases mainly as a result of the impairment of effective intra-community authority in the matters at issue, coupled with a clear supposition on the part of the members of St. Regis community to avoid the courts of at least to prefer dealing directly with the Department as an agent of external state authority". Thomas Stone. "Legal Mobilization and Legal Penetration: The Department of Indian Affairs and the Canadian Party at St. Regis, 1876-1918". Page 392

resistance and opposition to its actions. Each struggle in which the agents faced became a victory for me while reading the letterbooks, for I could not help but find solace in the power of the people of Ahkwesáhsne's collective activism. Thus, the settlement made between the DIA and the Band in the election of June 1899 was a victory of nearly twenty years in the making. And so, I could not help but feel the joy of the men in the band who left the council house cheering, before they returned into the building to face their disappointment with the Department representative.

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