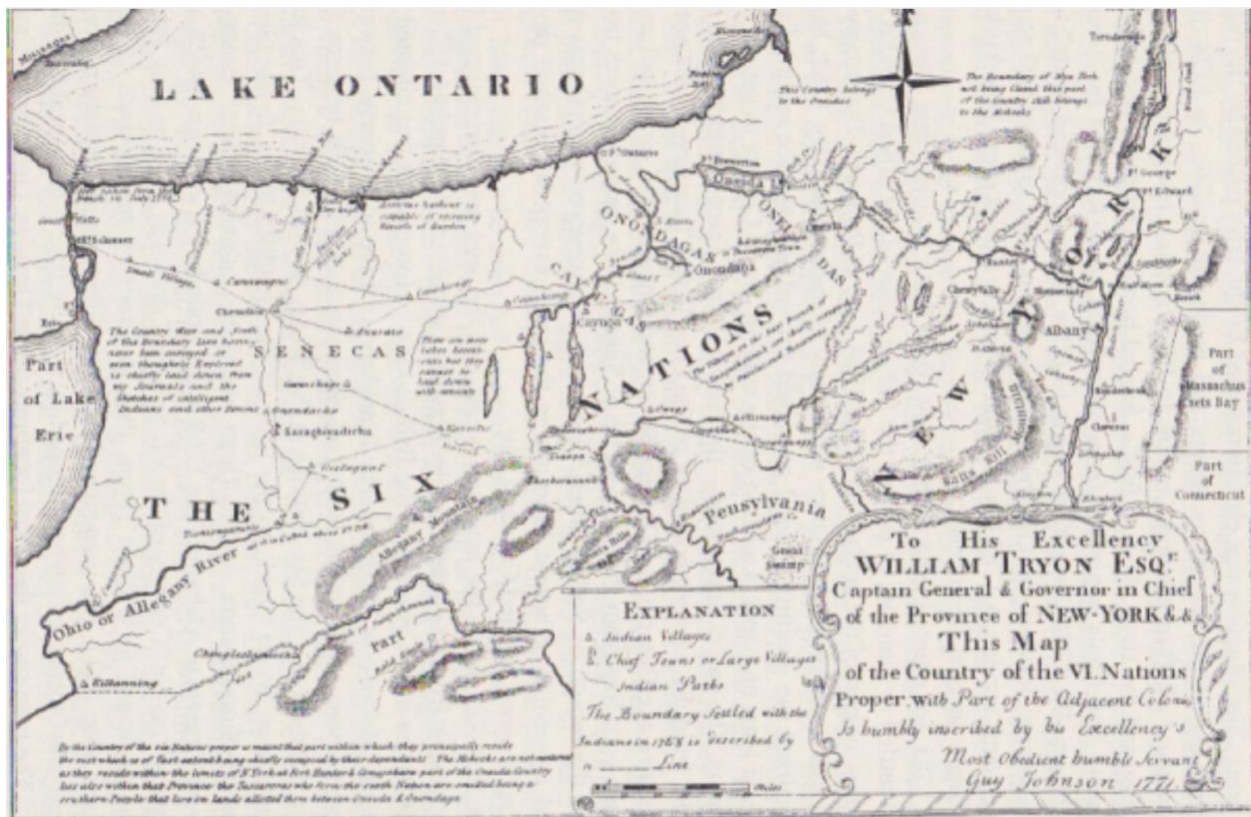




By: Kalhakú McLester

The Oneida went from one unified nation to three separate distinct settlements, to understand the factors that created this divide we must understand their history. The three communities of the Oneida are: Oneida of New York, Wolf Clan, Oneida of the Thames in Canada, Bear Clan, and Oneida of Wisconsin, Wolf Clan, at least initially.[1] The years leading up to and after the American Revolutionary War were the most turbulent and disastrous for the Oneida. The Oneida, along with the rest of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, also called the Iroquois Confederacy by the French (the name referenced in most historical documents), were caught in the middle of a domestic dispute between the British and the colonies.[2] The Iroquois allowed the Tuscarora Nation to take shelter within the Confederacy after which they were also referred to as the Six Nations. During the French and Indian War of 1763, the Iroquois had sided with the British and essentially won the war for the British.[3]



Map 10.1. Guy Johnson's map of the country of the Six Nations, 1771

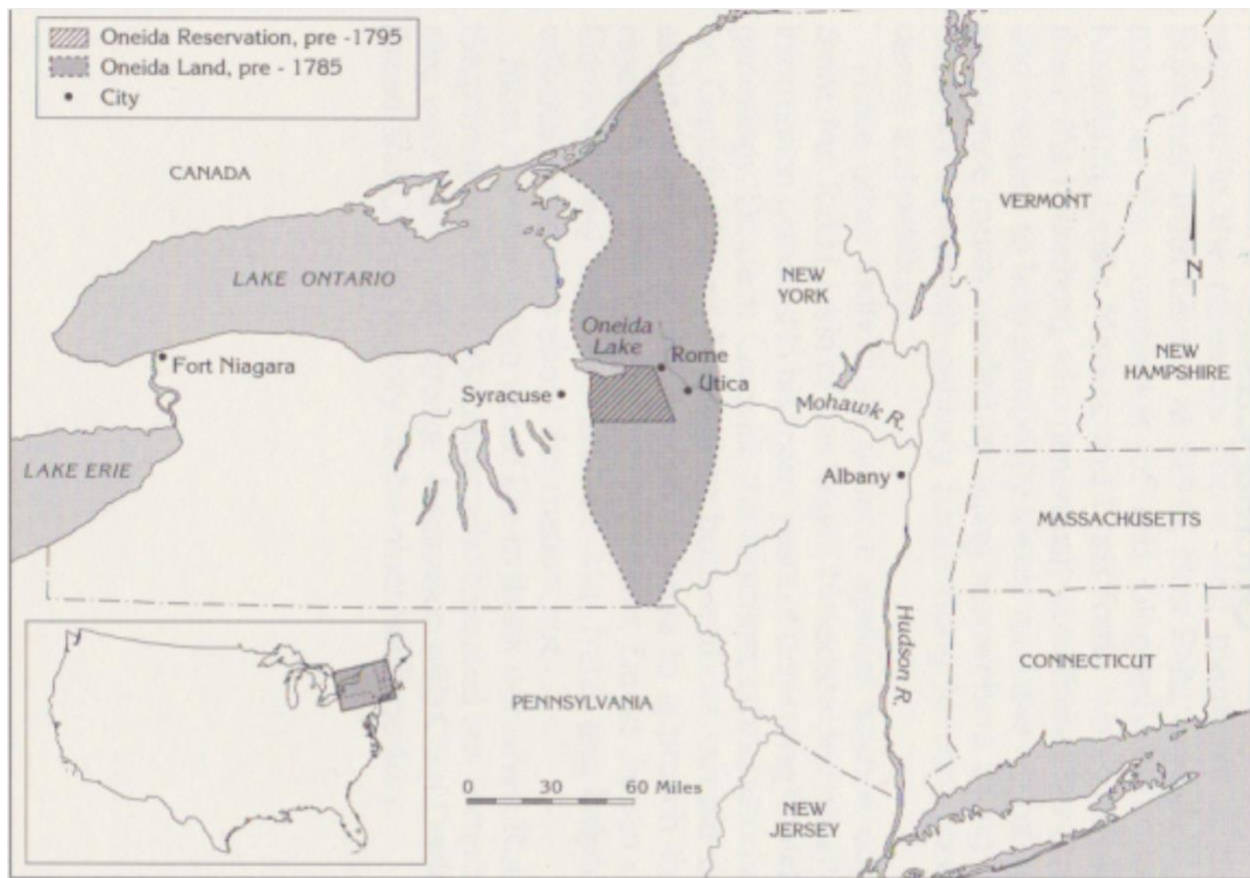
[4]

The American Revolution would test the allegiances of the Iroquois Confederacy. If they sided with the colonists they would be attacked by the British, if they sided with the British they would be attacked by the colonists. It was nearly impossible to remain neutral with battles being fought within Iroquois territory and ultimately the war came to their doorstep. Prior to the war, the colonies sent a message the Grand Council of the Iroquois pleading with them to remain neutral in the coming conflict with Britain.[\[5\]](#)

“This is a family quarrel between us and old England. You Indians are not concerned in it. We don’t wish you to take up the hatchet against the Kings troops. We desire you to remain at home and not join on either side but keep the hatchet very deep. In the name and behalf of all our people we ask and desire you to love peace and maintain it, and love and sympathize with us in our troubles; that the path may be kept open with all of our people and yours to pass and repass without molestation.” - US Continental Congress, 1775.[\[6\]](#)

The colonists recognized the power of the Iroquois and their neutrality or involvement in the war with Britain would be a deciding factor in the colonists’ victory or defeat. This point is further reinforced by L. Gordon McLester III an Oneida Historian from Oneida, Wisconsin where he tells of how the Oneida leadership pushed to keep the Iroquois Confederacy out of the war.[\[7\]](#) L. Gordon McLester shares further insights into the leadership of the Oneida, “If you step in between two brothers that are fighting when that fight is over the brothers will come after us.”[\[8\]](#) Initially, the stance of the Oneida leaders was to remain neutral and to look past the current conflict of the American Revolution, to the future beyond it.[\[9\]](#)

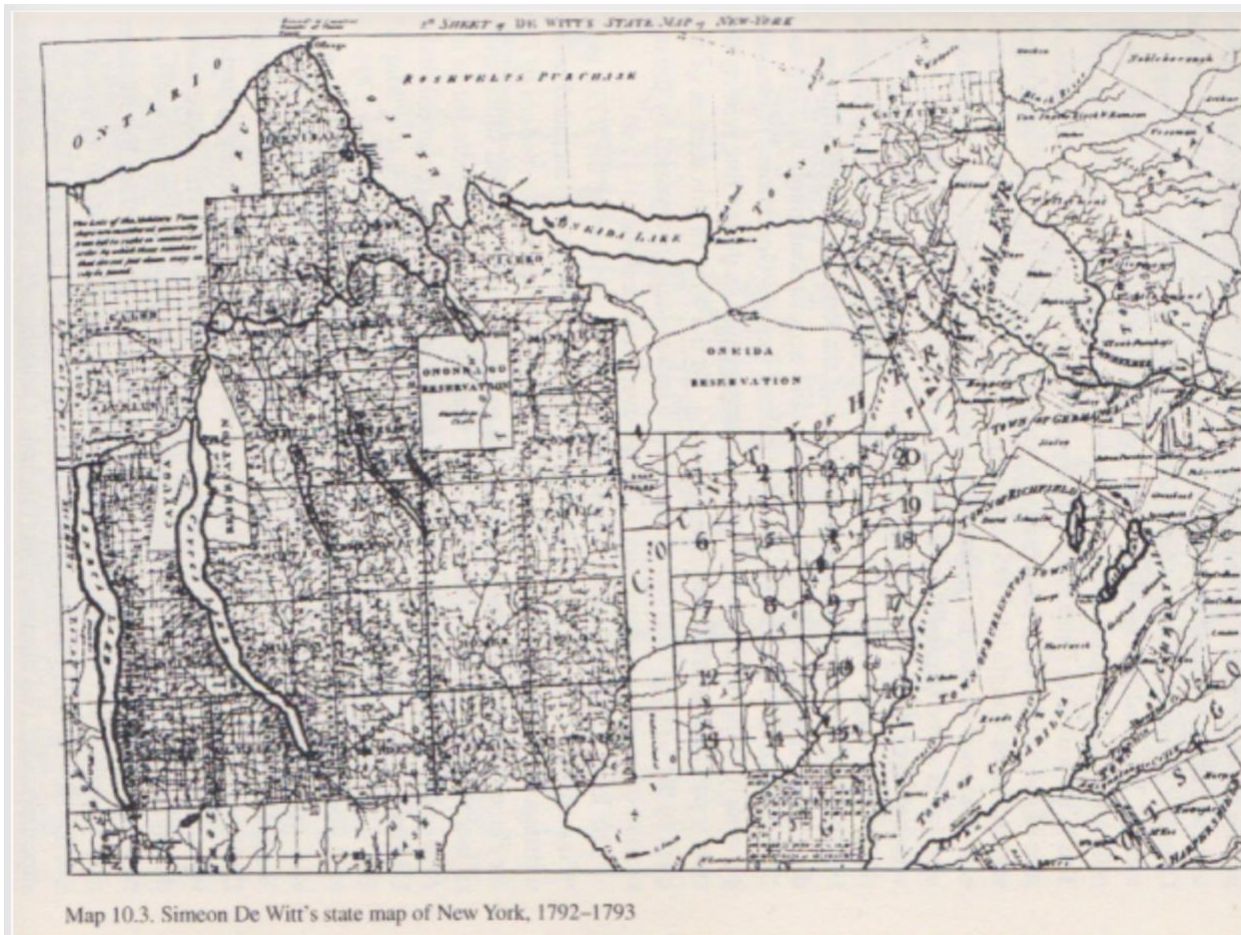
Unfortunately, this stance could not be held because of growing divisions amongst factions of Oneida people and competing leadership within the Iroquois. Ultimately, the Nations of the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Mohawk sided with the British while the Tuscarora sided with the colonies. The Oneida themselves were split, with a group following Samuel Kirkland, a missionary priest who urged the Oneida to ally with the colonies, and another group siding with the rest of the Iroquois Confederacy in support of the British.[\[10\]](#) The Oneidas that sided with the colonists made great sacrifices to ensure an American victory, not only sacrifices on the battlefield but sacrifices against their Iroquois brothers. Following the war, the Oneida expected to have the good graces of the American colonies.[\[11\]](#) This was not to be the case.



Oneida country after the American Revolution. From a map by Ben Simpson.

[\[12\]](#)

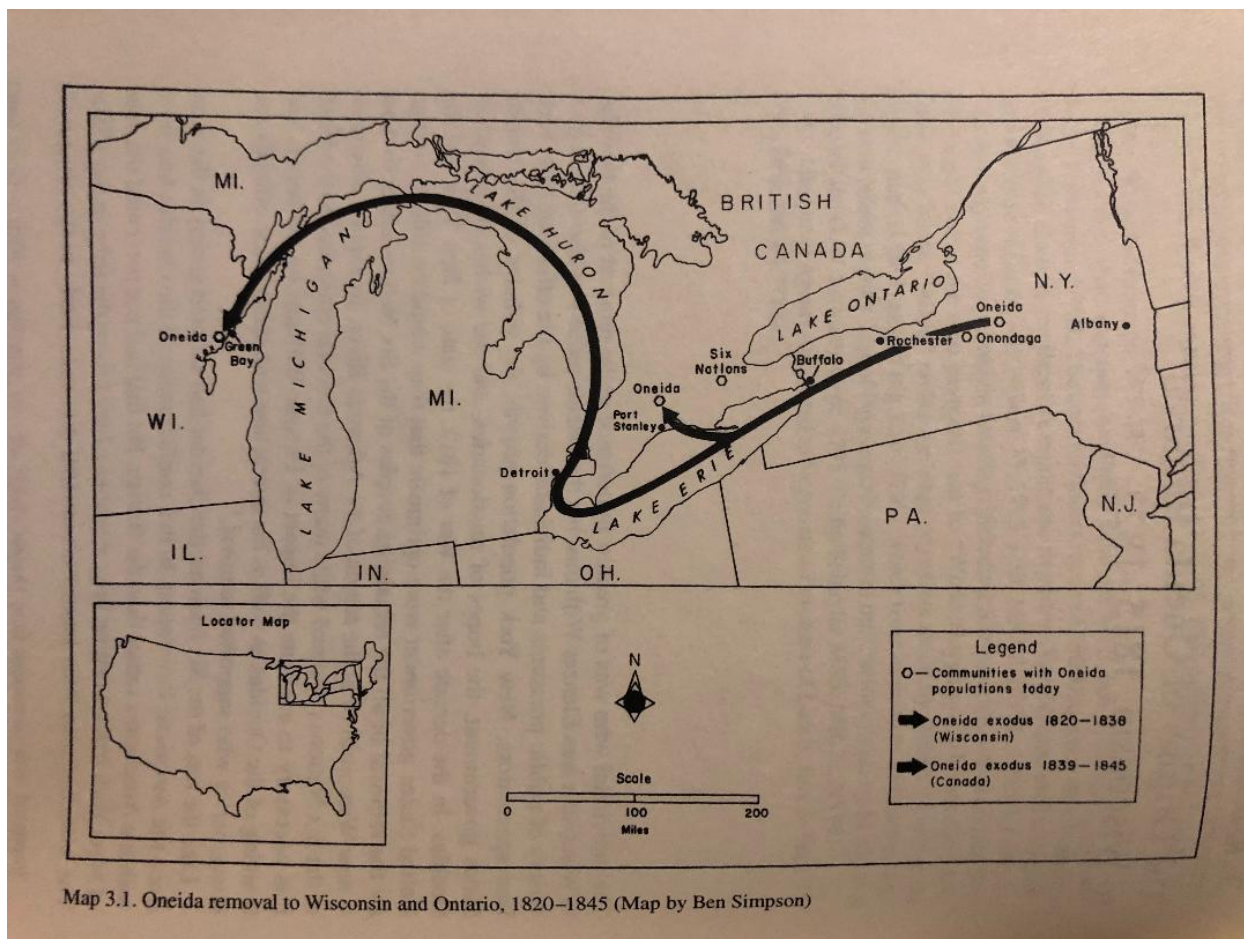
Even with their cooperation in the American Revolution, where the Oneida saw themselves as equal allies, not subordinates to the Americans, Oneidas watched as different land speculators and straight out swindlers from the United States as well as the New York State Legislature defrauded Oneida of over 5 million acres (New Hampshire and Vermont are roughly 6 million acres [\[13\]](#)) of their homelands. [\[14\]\[15\]](#) Each time a treaty was made to guarantee the rights and sovereignty to their lands the Americans' promises were often empty or ignored completely by New York State politicians such as Philip Schuyler. [\[16\]](#) Further distressing the Oneida was the encroachment of white land speculators and the settlers to follow. Oneida lands were targeted by the Western Inlock Navigation Company to create canals and roadways to open up lands in the Syracuse New Military Tract and make it attractive for sale. [\[17\]](#) These land speculators saw the riches to be taken advantage of such as the salt deposits in the Onondaga Territory in present day Syracuse, New York. [\[18\]](#) When the leadership of the Oneida caught on to this deception they stopped coming to the table with land speculators. But not to be denied, the speculators went to New York State which granted power of attorney to a small sympathetic group of Oneidas (not recognized Oneida leaders) and had them sign away large tracts of land for pennies to the speculators which resold land for untold profits. [\[19\]\[20\]](#)



Map 10.3. Simeon De Witt's state map of New York, 1792-1793

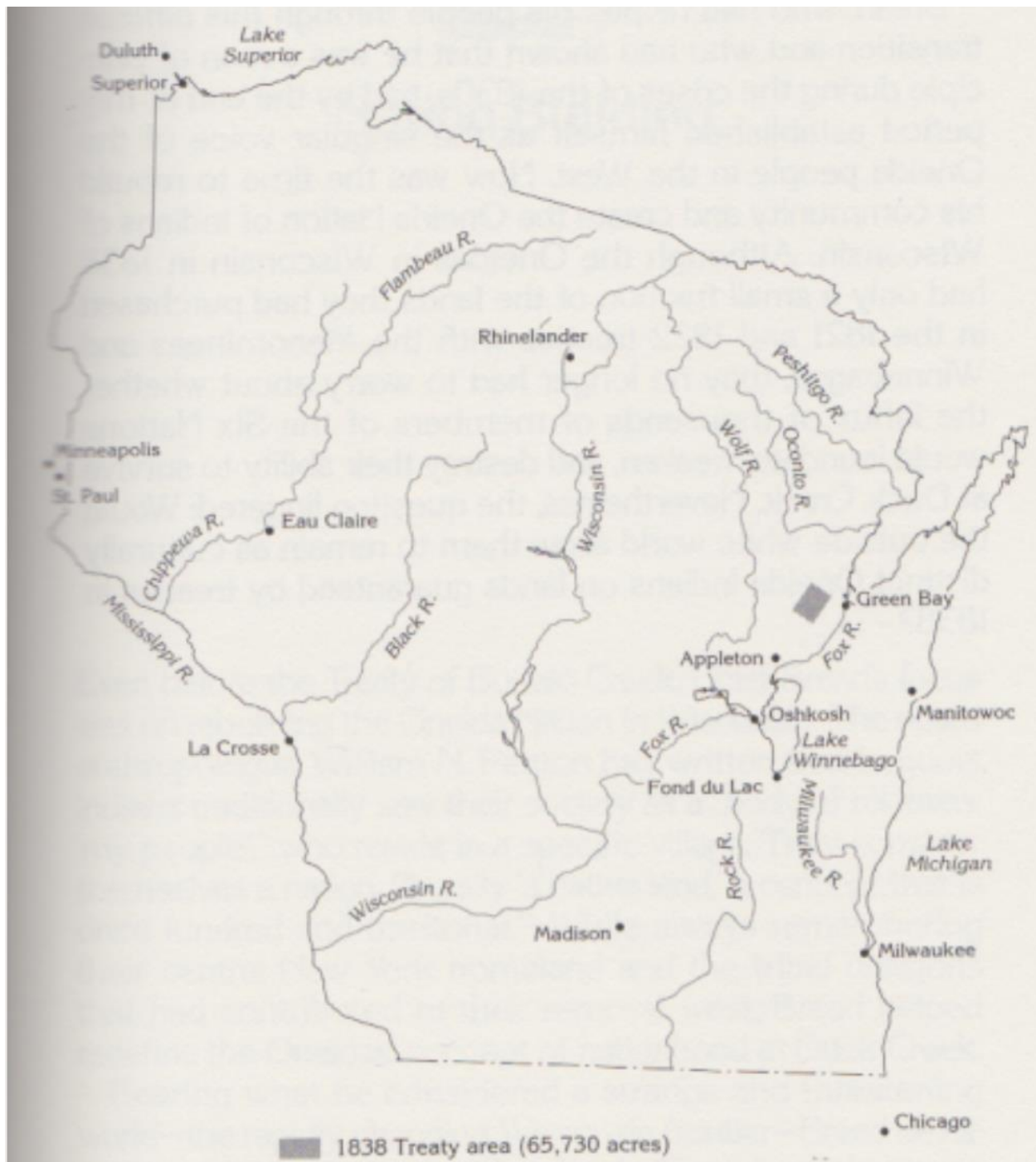
[21]

The growing divisions within the Oneida only added to the turmoil as many were converted to Christianity and others sought to maintain their traditional beliefs in the Longhouse. These groups were called the First Christian Party and the Pagan Party.[22] These different groups would be forced into migration by continued stealing of lands. Lands in Wisconsin were speculated and set aside for entire removal of the Iroquois Confederacy but leading up to the time when they were to move the rest of the Iroquois changed their minds and decided to stay in their current settlements.[23] Only a small group of 654 Oneida moved to Wisconsin where they had secured land purchases from the Menominee Nation of Indians.[24] The major relocations of Oneidas would be in 1820-1838 from New York to Wisconsin and in 1839-1845 from New York to Ontario. This happened in different waves as families moved away and moved back between Wisconsin, New York, and Ontario, Canada because of broken treaties, empty promises, and encroaching land speculators. Despite relocation efforts there was a group of Oneidas that never left their homelands and remain in upstate New York to this day.



[25]

When the dust settled the Oneida territory of more than six million acres had been reduced to only 32 acres in upstate New York. Lisa Latocha, an Oneida Historian from Oneida, New York, recounts the incident in detail from her studies in Oneida, New York and at Colgate University following the Dawes Act of 1887: Honyoust had “married a white woman and when he passed away she was about to sell the last of the land and the people who remained told her she could not sell the land and threw her out on the street.” It was only through this act that the last 32 acres never traded hands to a white person. [26] The Oneidas that stayed rebuilt what was left of their homelands while their brothers moved on to build settlements in Wisconsin and Canada. Although the Oneida Nation was fractured into three distinct communities each with their own sovereign government, some families and friends remained in contact for generations, sharing cultural knowledge, language, and teachings.



Oneida Indian Reservation under the Buffalo Creek Treaty of January 15, 1838, and Amended United States-Oneida Treaty of February 3, 1838. Sources: Oneida Nation of Indians of Wisconsin.

Picture of field at top of page is of actual Oneida Homelands in New York.

[1] Interview Lisa Latocha April 16, 2020

[2] Interview L. Gordon McLester III April 21, 2020

[3] <https://oneida-nsn.gov/our-ways/our-story/historic-timeline/the-french-and-indian-war/> May 1, 2020

[4] McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *The Oneida Indian Journey*. 1999. pg. 174

[5] Ayer. US Continental Congress. *Speech to the Six Nations from the 12 united Colonies at Philadelphia*. 1775

[6] Ayer. US Continental Congress. *Speech to the Six Nations from the 12 united Colonies at Philadelphia*. 1775.

[7] Interview L. Gordon McLester III April 21, 2020

[8] Interview L. Gordon McLester III April 21, 2020

[9] Interview L. Gordon McLester III April 21, 2020

[10] Interview L. Gordon McLester III April 21, 2020

[11] McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *The Oneida Indian Journey*. 1999. pg.23

[12] McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *Chief Daniel Bread*. 2002. pg.2

[13] <https://beef2live.com/story-ranking-states-total-acres-0-108930> May 3, 2020

[14] Interview L. Gordon McLester III April 21, 2020

[15] McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *The Oneida Indian Journey*. 1999. pg.10-11

[16] McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *The Oneida Indian Journey*. 1999. pg.23

[17] McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *The Oneida Indian Journey*. 1999. pg.10

[18] McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *The Oneida Indian Journey*. 1999. pg.10

[19] McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *The Oneida Indian Journey*. 1999. pg.11

[20] Interview Lisa Latocha April 16, 2020

[21] McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *The Oneida Indian Journey*. 1999. pg.181

[\[22\]](#) Interview Bill Gollnick April 22, 2020

[\[23\]](#) Interview Lisa Latocha April 16, 2020

[\[24\]](#) McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *The Oneida Indian Journey*. 1999. pg.71

[\[25\]](#) McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *The Oneida Indian Journey*. 1999. pg.54

[\[26\]](#) Interview Lisa Latocha April 16, 2020

[\[27\]](#) McLester III, L. Gordon. Hauptman, Laurence. *Chief Daniel Bread*. 2002. pg.97

Dedicated to L. Gordon McLester III and Chaz Wheelock 2020