

IROQUOIA

The journal of
the Conference on Iroquois Research

Volume 3 Number 1



Iroquoia

**The journal of the
Conference on Iroquois
Research**

Published by
The Conference on Iroquois Research
in cooperation with
The Iroquois Studies Association, Johnson, NY

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in cooperation with
The Iroquois Studies Association, Johnson, New York
Inquiries about manuscript submissions may be sent to
Iroquoia.journal@gmail.com.

ISSN: 2474-2856

Single issues \$10 plus postage
Digital copy \$10
www.Iroquoia.org

Cover design by Terry Abrams.

Cover photograph by Joseph Keppler, Jr., circa 1900, courtesy of
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Ladies of the Mohawk Valley: Molly Brant, Clarissa Putman and other women with *Rona'sharó:nih* (European) partners

PAUL GORGEN
INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER
MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS
KANATSIOHAREKE MOHAWK COMMUNITY

The partnership of Tekonwatonti (Molly Brant) and Sir William Johnson has few equals in American history. Together they forged a strong alliance between Great Britain and the Haudenosaunee, as partners in diplomacy, trade and war on the New York frontier in the mid-1700s. They also had a strong, enduring personal relationship that lasted 15 years and produced many children. After Johnson's death in 1774, Molly Brant's leadership continued, and she became all the more influential in her independent years.¹ As a native woman in colonial society, Molly Brant's experience was exceptional; yet she was also one of a group of women like her, Mohawks and descendants, who had European partners in the Mohawk Valley. As a group, they played a role in connecting the two populations more closely. They also drew strength from family networks and Mohawk cultural roles that helped sustain them and their children, as they found their places in colonial life.

This paper looks at Molly Brant's life and circumstances alongside those of Cornelia "Clarissa" Putman, the long-time partner of William Johnson's son John, including new information about Clarissa's native ancestry. In many ways, their marriages were intertwined and similar; their experiences and

accomplishments also built upon those of earlier women in their community, going back to the generation of first contact. These women had European spouses or partners, raised their children, and dealt with a range of issues including religious conversion, public scorn, abandonment, even pressure to give up their children. Most overcame those troubles and found positions that benefited themselves, their families and communities. The women also made paths for others like them, sometimes setting precedents or examples to follow, sometimes directly assisting each other: Molly Brant (first) and Clarissa Putman (later) both succeeded in getting new homes built for their families, to replace homes from which they were evicted when their relationships ended. Several of Clarissa's Mohawk aunts worked as translators for their people and the colonial government, and were rewarded for their services by both. One of them, Hillitie Van Slyke (married to a Dutchman), helped other Mohawk women with European partners get around barriers to marriage in a Christian church, going behind the minister's back when needed. A Clanmother in Molly's family married an Irishman but kept her language and her title, and passed them on to her children. A fur trader in Clarissa's family successfully fought off local officials who tried to shut down her business. And Clarissa, like one of her first grandmothers who had intermarried, resisted pressure to give up her own daughter, refused to let her go, and kept her.

The women in this story include several like Clarissa and Molly who were never officially married, or were abandoned by their partners, yet still managed to raise families and set their children on a good path. And some who married Europeans were still able to maintain their Mohawk language and clan roles, and raise their children as fluent Mohawk speakers who could perform traditional Longhouse ceremonies. Empowered and resourceful as Haudenosaunee women are raised to be, with *kontisastén:shera* (the strength of the women), they were able to act with force and set their own terms, despite the unequal treatment or hostility they met in colonial society.

Although relatively rare in colonial settlements on the Atlantic coast, intermarriage between Native Americans and Europeans were not uncommon along the fur-trading routes that extended west, ahead of settlement, from the 17th Century

onwards. Such blended marriages often had economic benefits for both parties, giving a native wife and her family access to trade goods, and her European husband access to her kinship networks.²

In the Mohawk Valley, intermarriages continued well into the era of settlement, and they helped to strengthen religious and political ties between the native and European communities.³ The inherent rights of Haudenosaunee women, including control of property and custody of their children, may have aided them in partnerships with Europeans, and contributed to their children's success in both Mohawk and European culture. Indeed, from the families in this study, one can argue that children of intermarriages in the Mohawk Valley stood to gain from both the maternal structure of their mother's culture and the paternal structure of their father's. In Haudenosaunee families, children take their mother's nationality and belong to their mother's clan, with support from all their clan relatives, and their father's ethnicity would not diminish those rights. On their father's side, the paternal nature of Dutch and English society could give children entry into European society under their father's surname, if they chose to do so. In some of the families seen here, children took different paths, with some siblings choosing to stay in their mother's community while others chose their father's. And some of the children, including several who became Mohawk translators and negotiators for the Johnson family, were able to fully live in both worlds, and make the best of both.

In most geographical areas where Europeans and native people intermarried, marriages usually conformed to the region's social hierarchy, with members of the elite marrying into elite families, and members of the rank and file doing likewise, as noted by Andrew Graybill in his book *The Red and the White*, 2013.⁴ The same balance generally held true in Mohawk Valley partnerships. In unions where the partners were not social equals, the balance of power might tilt in one partner's favor, for example giving the father's paternity more weight than the mother's maternal rights. Clarissa's bitter experience in defending her custody rights was a case in point.

Unlike Molly Brant and William Johnson, the relationship of Clarissa Putman and John Johnson is not well

From Iroquoia to Broadway: The Careers of Carrie A. Mohawk and Esther Deer

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*The Only Indian Actress, in her great sensational and
thrilling picture of frontier life*¹

Many indigenous peoples chose to perform in a variety of entertainment venues during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² This industry provided good paying and interesting work, even if it did portray them in stereotypical ways. Two Iroquoian women, Carrie A. Mohawk and Esther Deer, professionally known as “Gowongo Mohawk” and “Princess White Deer” respectively, had especially remarkable careers in and around New York City from 1885 to 1930. They took control of their careers and went so far as to write and star in their own productions. Though their professional careers followed similar trajectories, there is no indication the two ever met. This article narrates these women’s histories, briefly discusses how these two women’s lives represent Gerald

Vizenor's concept of "survivance," and ends by comparing their careers within an urban space. It accepts the notion that performance "produces a ... visceral impact on both audience and performer"³ and that both women understood this. Their presence on the stage and the control they had over their shows defied the trope of the vanishing Indian so prevalent during this era.

During the period these two women performed, many Native peoples earned a living by performing "Indianness." As a scholarly term, Indianness refers to attributes associated with North American indigenous peoples and their cultures. Often co-defined by Euro-North Americans and Native Americans alike, the substance of Indianness was multiple and even contradictory depending on location and circumstances.⁴ Performance Scholar E. Patrick Johnson argues that the performance of self is a way "to exercise control over the production of [ones'] images so [that people] feel empowered." These acts serve to sustain people when social systems fail them. Performance studies scholars Joshua David Bellin and Rosemary K. Bank suggest that these public performances did (and still do) more than reflect contemporary culture. These acts of cultural performance help to "constitute culture" and during the nineteenth century, Euro- and Native American performers rehearsed what it was to be North American. This was a performance that had been going on between the two peoples since the colonial period. However, according to Lakota historian Phillip Deloria the turn of the twentieth century was an especially "paradigmatic moment" as Euro-North Americans struggled with their feelings about modernization. They looked at those indigenous to the continent as symbolic of simpler and more authentic times.⁵ Meanwhile, Native peoples were struggling with how to deal with modernity and maintain their own distinct identity in the present.

Indigenous peoples performed aspects of their culture and Indianness for a variety of reasons such as: economic, political, to educate, and for self-validation purposes. To take this a step further, I turn to Anishinabe writer and American Studies scholar Gerald Vizenor and his concept of "survivance," which he defines as the ability of Native American peoples to do more than just survive.

Survivance is an active sense of native presence over absence, or sense of presence in native stories over absence of natives in histories. Survivance is a renunciation, or rejection, of the political and cultural dominance, and the unbearable sentiments of tragedy and victimry. Survivance is native courage, spirit, and native traditions.⁶

American Indian Studies scholar and White Earth Anishnaabe Jill Doerfler contends that indigenous peoples who are selectively choosing “adaptations to maintain their quality of life within a rapidly changing world” are engaging in survivance.⁷ Clearly, entertainers such as Carrie A. Mohawk (whose stage name was Gowongo Mohawk) and Esther Deer (professionally known as Princess White Deer) who performed Indianness were practicing survivance and they excelled at it.



Figure 1. Carrie Gowongo Mohawk, Publicity Photo, Gowongo Mohawk File, New York Public Library of Performing Arts, New York City

Carrie A. Mohawk was born at Gowanda on the Cattaraugus Seneca reservation on August 11, 1859 to a Seneca father named Ga-Na-Gua and her mother Lydia.⁸ According to a 1908 interview with Carrie Mohawk, Lydia was part American Indian and known on the reserve as “The Angle.”⁹ The 1865 New York State Census for Greene also notes Lydia was Indian along with her husband and daughter. However, further genealogical research indicates Lydia was probably born in Ohio to Euro-American parents from New York State.¹⁰ It is possible that

because Lydia was married to a Seneca man, she was legally considered to be Indian (see Georgette Deer’s story below). The

Proceedings*

Anthony F. C. Wallace Memorial Papers

From the 2016 Conference on Iroquois
Research in memory of our colleague.



Anthony F C Wallace, Courtesy,
American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia

*The following papers were read at a previous conference and
have not been peer reviewed.

Anthony F. C. Wallace: Homage to a Professor

MARSHALL JOSEPH BECKER
PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF ANTHROPOLOGY
WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

The death of Anthony Francis Clark Wallace (1923-2015) marks the passing of the last of the great anthropologists of in a generation of greats. The celebration of his life and many important contributions to Anthropology has been marked by two outstanding works, a memoir by Greg Urban (2016) and an obituary by Sol Katz (2017), two of the outstanding scholars of the next generation. The brief story that follows here is a personal reflection that reveals how Tony influenced my decision to come to Penn, and his input (or lack thereof) to the way I progressed through that important program, and its influence on my work thereafter. In some ways it also reveals much about the Penn tradition in Anthropology; a tradition that seems to have changed enormously in the past two decades. The eclectic nature of the faculty when I first encountered them in 1956, and the broad anthropological training that they provided those students have been critical to developing and sustaining the four fields approach to the discipline. This approach became

ANTHONY FRANCIS CLARK WALLACE

WENDY BISSELL
TUSCARORA NATION

A hefty name for a humble man. Most people he introduced us to called him "Dr. Wallace." We called him "Tony."

We all grew to love him and apparently he felt the same way about us because he kept returning to Tuscarora. Eventually, he stayed.

Our bond improved his life and ours. We taught each other and laughed a lot. He became welcomed in our Tuscarora Community and belonged to the Tuscarora Historical Society, participated in Tuscarora Temperance gatherings, worked with us in the food booth at the Annual Tuscarora Nation Picnic and almost attended the Tuscarora Baptist Church Sunday service once. He kept his spiritual beliefs to himself. He had no religious beliefs.

He first met me the year I was born, 1949. We were meant to be family.

Tony loved being the observer. We miss him, miss his knowledge, and miss his soft laughter.

Nya:we for the opportunity to talk about your friend. He loved this conference and looked forward to coming every year.

Yeh sen aruh creh

Wendy Bissell

ANTHONY F. C. WALLACE, SOL TAX, AND ACTION ANTHROPOLOGY

LAURENCE M. HAUPTMAN

SUNY DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF HISTORY

The late Anthony F. C. Wallace, a most innovative scholar, is remembered today among Iroquoianists for his masterful ethnohistories of the Senecas and Tuscaroras.¹ Wallace's writings on revitalization movements, that culminated in his 1970 *magnum opus*, *The Death and Rebirth of the Senecas*, is a book that directly influenced my work.² This brief presentation explores the influence of Sol Tax on Wallace's research in the 1950s, namely from the time he completed his first fieldwork project and publication at Tuscarora, to the time he began publishing his work on revitalization movements. It is based on a careful reading of Wallace's correspondence housed at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia and in the Sol Tax' papers at the University of Chicago. Tax, an anthropologist not associated with the Iroquois (Hodinöhsö:ni'), had a major influence on Wallace. Throughout the decade of the 1950s, Wallace corresponded and shared his research with Tax,

The Pilgrim's Journey of Anthony F. C. Wallace

DEBORAH R. HOLLER
RETIRED LECTURER SUNY EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE
AND NEW YORK COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

In December of 1942, a 19 year old scholar put aside his college books and left his home in Pennsylvania to become a warrior in the US Army. After basic training and a year of electrical engineering courses in the Army Specialized Training Program, Anthony F. C. Wallace, known as “Wally” to his Army buddies, was assigned to the 14th Armored Division and landed on the docks of Marseille in October. From there, he and his radio crew would follow the 154th Signal Company across France into Germany. Along the way he would come to know the “fog of war” and the tragedies of destruction and human failures that would influence his research and writing for the rest of his life. “The war was a mess,” he would write later. “To an enlisted man on the ground, the impression was that we were pawns in a game of chess, sliding about on a slippery board, moved by masters whose glasses were always fogged....Equipment breaks down, bad weather is unexpected, intelligence is faulty, communications are clogged, ammunition runs out, spies watch and listen, gasoline supplies are low, parachute troops drop in wrong places....” The incidents that framed his experience in

Anthony F. C. Wallace's Tuscarora Recordings

KATHRYN LAVELY MERRIAM
NORWICH UNIVERSITY

Anthony F. C. Wallace made a series of audio recordings of Tuscarora language and culture for the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia in 1948 and '49. Since I also study the Tuscarora I was interested in learning more about these recordings when I spent a month at the APS in 2007 as a fellow. I was able to see Wallace's papers that summer since he had already deposited them with the library. These audio recordings are a valuable resource for language comparison study and oral history. Some of the material is in English, some in Tuscarora. Here is my experience with this collection.

I spent July of 2007 at the American Philosophical Society as a library Fellow. Since the Tuscarora are one of my research interests I asked to examine the Tuscarora audio recordings with their accompanying transcripts and keys. I got the paper transcripts, but the archivist was sorry to tell me that the recordings were too fragile to permit me to listen to them. Wallace had originally recorded the material on a Detroit WiRecorder, a device that used wire, not tape, to record audio. From his notes, it was clear that Wallace struggled with this medium. The wire broke and twisted, and it had to be spliced

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