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The Search for Rochester's Earliest Inhabitants On the Trail with George Harris, The Pathfinder

By William T. Davis

One hundred years ago George H. Harris wrote for William F. Peck's *Semi-Centennial History of Rochester* the first fifteen chapters entitled "The Aboriginal History of Rochester." Who was this man? Some said he was Rochester's Henry David Thoreau. Blake McKelvey declared that he was Rochester's most capable amateur historian. The Senecas, who made him an honorary member of the Wolf Clan, called him "Ho-tar-shan-nyoh" — the PATHFINDER. What started him on his life time pursuit?

Our knowledge of Harris comes from his section in Peck's history; manuscripts and newspaper articles in the Harris collection at the Local History Division of the Rochester Public Library; manuscripts in the Department of Rare Books in Rush Rhees Library; and from several articles and references in the *Publication Fund Series* of the Rochester Historical Society. Still a mystery is the location of Harris' extensive collection of several thousand carefully cataloged artifacts.

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Harris' grandparents settled in Rochester on what was to become Mt. Hope Avenue near the present site of the University of Rochester in the early 1800s. His father was involved in lumbering which meant many moves for the family. They lived in Charlotte, West Greece, Rochester, Hinsdale, Buffalo, and Green Bay, Wisconsin, where the elder Harris managed extensive logging camps. George was born in West Greece in 1843.

When he was a young lad in Rochester the Harris family lived on the hill overlooking the bend of the Genesee at the present site of the River Campus. George spent many hours roaming along the bank of the river fishing and following old Indian trails. This area was the juncture of the trail to Irondequoit Bay, the Red Creek trail, and several river trails.

He found several artifacts including an ancient spear point. The discovery of this spear point triggered a series of events which launched Harris in his pursuit as pathfinder.

One wintry evening when George and his mother were gathered around the family fire, two Indians knocked on the door and indicated they would like shelter for the night. Apparently the Harris family favored cordial treatment for the Indians and a request like this was not unusual. The visitors prepared meals from the food they carried and made ready to sleep by the fire.

The older Indian noticed the spear point George had found and asked through the second Indian, an interpreter, if he knew how this was used. The Indian then proceeded to the woodshed where he selected and shaped a shaft to which he attached the point. Encouraged by George's enthusiasm he also made him a bow and arrow.

A second event that would cement George's relationship with the natives occurred when he was roving along the river and spied several Indian children in a canoe without paddles drifting dangerously toward the rapids. George describes the incident in these words:

One peculiar feature of our river was its crookedness. For a hundred miles above our home the channel twisted and turned to every point of the compass and the numberless curves and points along the shores afforded a variety of natural scenery seldom found in an equal length of water course.

The souls of the stolid redmen, whose council fires gleamed across its waters centuries before, had been touched by these views and the stream and plain were known to them as "the beautiful river" and "pleasant valley" long before the white man's glance visited upon the scene.

Our home was in the center of a great curve of the river with deep water in front and above us, and a long rapids below.

In the summer when the water was low, a child could safely wade on the ledge of limestone at the ford, but during the spring it was quite a different matter. The drainage of all the country above came down in a flood that in many places overflowed the river bank and swept away every moveable thing exposed to its tremendous force. The only safe method of crossing the river at this season was in boats at places where the water was deep and the current smooth. Nearly every rod of the river channel shown in the sketch could be seen from my favorite playground on the knoll. The outlook was particularly attractive to me during the flood stage when large trees and logs were born down the stream and huge masses of ice were crashed over the rapid rocks by the restless waters.

While in the grove one day during the flood season I heard the reports of two guns in quick succession. Knowing that the settlers and Indians sometimes gave such a signal in times of danger, I hastened to the highest part of the knoll to look about.

One glance up the river revealed the cause of alarm. Two or three persons were running among the trees on the western bank keeping as near as possible to a large canoe that was slowly rounding the point above. The heads of two or three young Indians were visible above the sides of the boat near the center, while a lad about my own age was in the stern where he had taken a position to act as a steersman; but his hands were empty and I quickly perceived that by some mischance the canoe had been set adrift without paddles.

The children sat motionless, their round black eyes glancing from bank to bank in search of succor. I knew that no aid would reach them from the shore and the dull roar of waters in the rapids below sounded in my ears like the knell of death. I fancied I could see the overturned canoe tossed here and there among the breakers and the helpless little waifs engulfed in the angry waters which were sweeping them onward to extinction. The thought was overpowering; clasping both hands over my eyes I turned to run away.

Suddenly there came into my mind an injunction often repeated by my father. "In danger keep cool. Think quick and act prompt."

Glancing down the river I noted every curve of the bank and line of the current. A great mass of rocks occupied the stream some little distance above the ford dividing the water in two distinct currents. That on the right struck the east bank at the ford ledge, shot away against a second mass of rocks farther down then turning to the right it passed close to the point of a sharp curve and followed the line of the shore.

I knew that a considerable distance down the river a great flat rock jutted from the bank forming a little cove where I often went to fish.¹

Harris then details how, through sign language, he directed the boy to use his foot as a rudder to get to the east bank. He flew over the ground to reach the flat rock. Watching some driftwood in the current he realized that the canoe would drift out of reach.

It was his practice to leave fishing spears with lines at his favorite fishing spots. George picked up his spear as the canoe came into sight. Throwing the spear to pierce the bow, he gradually guided the canoe to safety and then collapsed from the strain.

When he came to, his father and Tall Chief, the Indian who had stopped at his home, were gathering up the children. The older boy in the canoe, about Harris' age, was Tall Chief's son, Onoto.

As a result of this experience the fathers set up an exchange visit. Onoto would visit the Harris home and George would spend time at Tall Chief's encampment on Irondequoit Bay.

It was Bill Histed, the Harris' hired man, who suggested that they begin to teach each other their language. This started George on a life long study of the Iroquois language and the pursuit of Indian trails and customs.

When George was thirteen his family moved to Green Bay, Wisconsin. Although frail, the lad spent a year in the forest and along the streams where he became an expert with the rod and line, rifle, and canoe. He was only a few miles from an Oneida reservation. We can assume he continued his interest in Indian lore.

In 1858 George became an apprentice to a watchmaker for three years, and the rest of the family returned to Rochester. Fortunately for George, the watchmaker had an excellent library of history and literature where he spent many hours.

Returning to Rochester in 1861, Harris had a brief military career as a student at Pierce's Military Academy and as a sergeant in the 54th Regiment stationed in Elmira. After the war he drifted as far west as Cheyenne, Omaha, and Saint Joe where he was in contact with such tribes as Omahas, Poncas, Shawnees, Kiowas, Crow, and Sioux. He worked as a railway mail clerk.

After a severe illness in 1869 he came back to Rochester where he studied surveying, drafting, and landscape gardening. His mentor was George Stillson, Superintendent of Mount Hope Cemetery.

By 1872 he had met and married Julia Hughes who had been principal of School 19. They moved to Peterboro, Ontario where George laid out and beautified the Little Lake Cemetery. His interest in Indian life continued as he investigated the shell heaps of Rice Lake, and the Mississaugas people who had originally inhabited the Genesee Country.

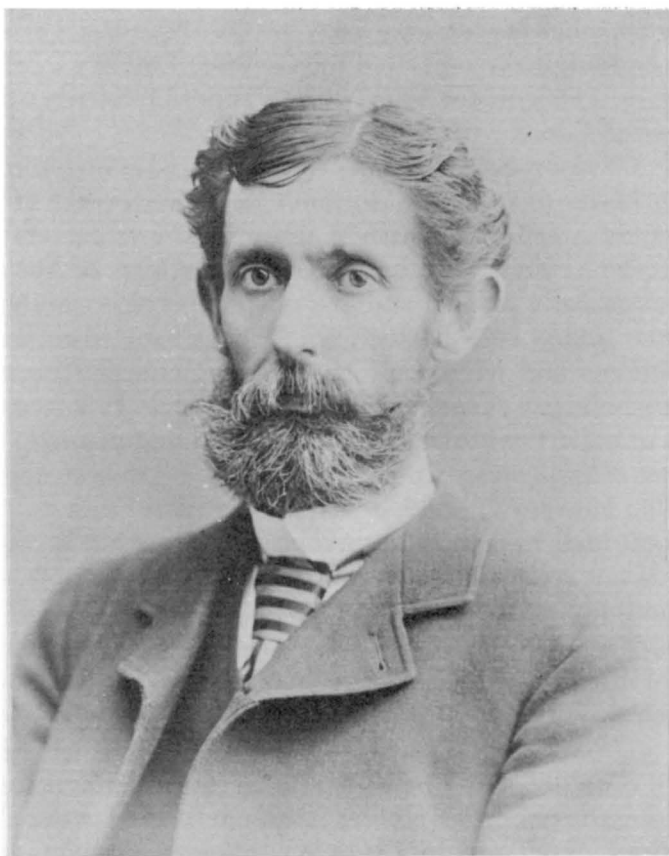
His next assignment was a two year superintendency of the Elmwood Cemetery in Detroit.

In 1877 he brought his wanderings to an end as he returned to Rochester to work for Mortimer Reynolds, owner of the Reynolds Arcade. The Arcade, one of the first centers for Rochester's culture and commerce, was the work of Abelard Reynolds, early pioneer and first postmaster of Rochester.

Once settled back in Rochester, Harris focused on early inhabitants and white pioneers in the Genesee Country. "Every holiday was spent in exploring the sites of villages, the lines of trails, the burial grounds and camping places of the Indians of the Genesee Country and in studying their customs," recalled Howard Osgood, a well-known local historian. "At the same time, he collected data concerning the white pioneers of the same region. His collection of books, manuscripts, and Indian relics grew rapidly, and his note books filled fast."²

Harris was a frequent contributor to local newspapers, sharing the information he had gathered in his search. His first major historical writing was for William F. Peck's *Semi-Centennial History of Rochester* published in 1884. He wrote the first fifteen chapters on the aboriginal and pioneer history of Rochester, covering the period before the Scrantoms settled in the One Hundred Acre Tract in 1812. According to Osgood, who delivered a memorial address on Harris, "It made a reputation for him and he was immediately in demand as a lecturer and writer on aboriginal and local history."³

In 1886 Harris lectured before the pupils of public schools Numbers 10 and 16 on the "Aboriginal History of Rochester,"



George Henry Harris (1843-1893)

and before Irondequoit school No. 3 on "The Aboriginal History of Irondequoit." He illustrated these lectures with a collection of more than one thousand relics. In the same year he read a paper on "The Early History of Western New York" before the Livingston County Historical Society. In 1887 he published a partial history on Denonville's Expedition of 1687, having identified to his own satisfaction the location of the battlefields and the lines of advance and retreat of the invading army.

In 1889 he read before the [Rochester Historical Society] two interesting papers, one on the aboriginal terminology of the Genesee River, the other on Pioneers of the Genesee Valley—The Markhams.

For the centennial celebrations of Victor and Rush on July 4, 1889, he prepared orations on the aboriginal history of these two places. In 1891 he read before the Rochester Academy of Science a valuable and scientific paper on the *Root Foods of the Seneca Indians*. In 1892 his lecture on the *Life and Letter of Baron La Hontan* was read before the Wyoming County Historical Society.

He left in nearly complete state, a *Life of Horatio Jones* and a *History of the Markham Family*. The life of Jones is full of stirring narrative; captured and adopted by the Senecas, he learned their habits and language and became the chief intermediary between the Indians and whites. After the Revolution closed he was United States interpreter, and upon the opening of the Genesee Country, was one of its most prominent white residents.⁴

His honesty of purpose and his extensive and accurate information soon commanded the respect of the Indians and he became their adviser, confidant, and trusted friend. In 1889 he was adopted into the Wolf Clan of the Seneca Nation and received the name "the Pathfinder" in recognition of his attainments.

Despite his strenuous schedule of hiking, writing, and lecturing, Harris found time to help found two canoe clubs and, in 1884, sorted and classified the volumes that formed the nucleus of the Reynolds Library.

George Harris' career was cut short when he suffered a collapse in 1893. It may have been that the demands of his avocation and vocation, combined with the malady that had plagued him intermittently since youth, at last caught up with him. He died in October 1893 at the age of 50.

Much of his work was unfinished. The Buffalo Historical Society completed his work on Horatio Jones. His work on the pioneer Markhams was written for the family and was not published.

After his death letters poured in from his network of friends who followed historic pursuits. Mr. R. E. Lawton of Manning, N.Y. wrote, "In the death of Mr. Harris the Seneca nation lost a valuable member and the Six Nations, at large, a true friend. No man ever possessed more of the respect and reverence of the Indians who knew him than George H. Harris."⁵

* * * *

The best way to gain an appreciation for the accomplishments of George Harris is to read his account of the prehistory and early history of the Genesee Country, published a century ago as the first fifteen chapters of Peck's Semi-Centennial History of Rochester. Limitation of space forbids a complete reprinting here. But these excerpts ought to convey a sense of Harris' scope and style.

CHAPTER I

ABORIGINAL OCCUPATION OF THE LOWER GENESSEE COUNTRY

The aboriginal occupation of America is a subject of exhaustless research. Among the many divisions of this subject none present so broad a field of observation to the thoughtful investigator as the antique remains of the continent

The interest in such remains is not alone confined to those found in America. The Old World has celebrated in prose and verse the antiquities of ancient empires and the relics of nations and tribes of primitive people to whom it is not difficult to trace an historical connection; while men of the highest scientific attainments engage in the collection and collation of evidences of the antiquity of the human race. The New World possesses no record of historic reference whereby the truth respecting her primitive peoples can be established. The fragmentary knowledge possessed by historians is derived from evidences furnished by time-worn remains, mythology and analogous reasoning, and Foster tells us, in his admirable work, *The Prehistoric Races of the United States*, that but recently a deep feeling of distrust pervaded the public mind of this country in reference to every discovery which is supposed to carry back the origin of man to a period antecedent to the historical era; "and yet," continues the same author, "reasoning from palaeontological analogies, we ought to expect to find evidences of the human occupancy of this continent, reaching back to an antiquity as remote as on the European continent."

Happily, modern thought is progressive

. . . [T]he origin of man, even, may be assigned to this, the most ancient of continents. Revelations of so startling a nature are the result of patient investigations pursued by learned men, who find the chronology of the Hebrew Pentateuch, which would bring everything relating to human history within

the short compass of four thousand and four years antecedent to the Christian era, insufficient to account for the mutations the earth has undergone

We speak of the race of men found in possession of this continent at the time of its discovery by Europeans in the fifteenth century as the Aborigines of America, and long usage has rendered the term, in the sense in which it is applied to the Indians, peculiarly fitting, though incorrect. They were natives of America, but not its original inhabitants. There are proofs of the presence here of people who lived at so early a period of time that no authoritative reference to them has ever been found in written history. We know of their existence, and occupation of the land, only through discovery of remains of a character suggestive of the term "Mound-builders," which has become their historical designation. For the history of time and events back of the red man and the Mound-builder, we must penetrate the earth itself, and, from the evidentiary material discovered, trace or reason out a parallelism with existing forms and conditions, basing our conclusions entirely upon the principle that from the beginning of time nature has worked upon the same plan, with like forces and results as at present.

.....

The grand Indian trail from the Genesee falls to the Niagara river passed along the summit of [the Lake Ontario] ridge, and for over seventy years the white man has used it as a road-bed (for one of the most extensively traveled highways in New York) between Rochester and Lewiston. The farm of David Tomlinson is situated on the Ridge road, half a mile west of the village of Gaines, Orleans county. When first occupied in 1814 the ground was covered by forest trees of large growth, many being three and four feet in diameter, and the stumps of two, especially noted as standing over a mile north of the ridge, measured, each, nearly eight feet across the top. As far as the eye could reach in either direction the ridge in this vicinity then declined toward the lake in a smooth, unbroken

grade, and about one hundred and fifty feet north of its center the clear waters of a spring bubbled forth and darted away lakeward in a tiny rivulet. From the main Indian trail on the ridge a path led down to the spring, which was well known to the Indians, who often camped in the neighborhood.

In 1824 the spring-basin was cleaned out and stoned up in the form of a well. In 1853 the water failed and the well was deepened. In 1864 the well bottom was lowered to a total depth of twenty feet. About eighteen feet below the original surface the digger came upon a quantity of brush overlying an ancient fireplace, consisting of three round stones, each about one foot in diameter, placed in the form of a triangle. A mass of charcoal and ashes surrounded the stones which were burned and blackened by fire and smoke. Several sticks were found thrust between the stones, the inner ends burned and charred as left by the expiring flames. A careful inspection of these sticks by a gentleman thoroughly acquainted with the nature and grain of various woods proved them to be hemlock and ash. Some were denuded of bark and had the smooth surface usually presented by water-washed wood found on any beach. Several sticks were split, and surrounding one was a depressed ring, or indentation, as though some dull instrument had been employed in an effort to weaken or break the wood. The ashes were indurated to a degree requiring the use of a pick in their removal, and rested upon a stratum of sand, which was also in a hardened condition The fireplace and all the details of its narrow surroundings, which were carefully noted, clearly indicated that it had been made upon a sand-beach

In a survey of the grounds and after thorough consideration of the circumstances the writer became assured of the following conclusions: The fireplace was constructed by persons having the use of rude implements and possessed of some knowledge of cookery, at a period just previous to the formation of the ridge It is evident that the spring came into operation long after the ridge was formed, and the rise of the water directly above the fireplace was incidental, there being no connection whatever between the two.

... [I]f the age of the ridge can be even approximately determined, some idea can be had of the length of time [man] has occupied our home territory

CHAPTER II

In this chapter Harris outlines the geology of the Rochester area, describing the great lakes that once covered the surface and the shift of the Genesee's discharge from Irondequoit Bay to Charlotte. Two of his conclusions are that the lake ridge antedates the river and that the fireplace at Gaines might be as old as 14,000 years.

CHAPTER III

That a race, or races, of men preceded the Indians in the occupation of this country is too well understood to require special iteration. We may never learn the origin of those ancient people, or gather more than scattering lines of their history, but tangible, imperishable proofs of their former presence on a large area of the American continent still remain in the form of earthworks which extend from New York westwardly along the southern shore of Lake Erie, and through Michigan and the intermediate states and territories to the Pacific. They have been found on the shores of Lake Pepin, and on the Missouri river over one thousand miles above its junction with the Mississippi, and extend down the valley of the latter to the gulf of Mexico. They line the shores of the gulf from Texas to Florida, continue in diminished numbers into South Carolina, and stand as eternal sentinels on the Rio Grande del Norte.

.....

While these monuments are not generally supposed to exist beyond the tributary sources of the Alleghany, in Western New York, there would appear to be reasonable grounds for a belief that the Mound-builders, or other ancient people, extended their settlements into the interior of the state, and dwelt here in considerable numbers In *Seaver's Life of Mary Jemison*, page 134, we find the following statements, received from her own lips:

... The Indians are confident that many parts of this country were settled, and for a number of years occupied, by a people of whom their fathers never had any traditions, as they never had seen them. Whence these people originated, and whither they went, I have never heard one of the oldest and wisest Indians pretend to guess ... The tradition of the Seneca Indians in regard to their [own] origin is that they broke out of the earth from a large mountain at the head of Canandaigua Lake, and that mountain they still venerate as the place of their birth. Thence they derive their name "Ge-nun-da-wah," or "Great Hill People." The Senecas have a tradition that previous to, and for some time after, their origin at Genundawah, the country, especially about the lakes, was thickly inhabited by a race of civil, enterprising and industrious people who were totally destroyed by the great serpent that afterward surrounded the great hill fort, with the assistance of others of the same species, and that they (the Senecas) went into possession of the improvements left.

"On the shore of Lake Ontario, on a high bluff near Irondequoit bay, in 1796," says Oliver Culver, "the bank caved off and untombed a great quantity of human bones, of a large size. The arm and leg bones, upon comparison, were much larger than those of our own race."⁶ The bluff mentioned by Mr. Culver was the seaward side of an elevated spot that might properly be termed a natural mound. It was one of the outlying range of sand hills or knolls, then existent along the shore of the lake in that locality, and long years ago succumbed to the never-ceasing encroachment of the lake waters. Its location was immediately west of the angle formed by the present west line of Irondequoit bay and Lake Ontario; as late as 1830 human bones of an unusually large size were occasionally seen projecting from the face of the bluff, or lying on the beach where the undermined soil had fallen. The tribe of Seneca Indians living in Irondequoit in 1796 could give no information concerning these bones, stating their belief that they were the remains of a people who dwelt about the bay before the Indians came there.

In the pages omitted here, Harris describes the investigation of several "aboriginal monuments" within the boundaries of Monroe County by Ephraim G. Squier of the Smithsonian, whose work was published in Antiquities of New York (Buffalo, 1851). He also discusses important sites at Brewer's and Hanford's (King's) Landings, on the east and west sides of the lower Genesee River gorge, respectively.

Both sites are located a short distance south from today's Veterans Memorial Bridge.

Discoveries have been made, at various places . . . [west of the lower falls] . . . of mounds and burial grounds containing human skeletons considerably larger than men of the present day, copper ornaments, etc., and one or two instances will be given. In excavating for sand on the farm of Samuel Truesdale, in the Town of Greece, in 1878, several skeletons were disinterred, one from its immense size attracting particular attention. Nearly the entire frame was secured and removed to a level spot between two trees, where Warren Truesdale placed each bone in its natural position. The skeleton thus reformed measured over eight feet in length. A piece of mica and a rude arrow point were found in the grave above the bones, which were about three feet below the general surface, and entirely separate from the other skeletons. A small mound, perhaps a foot in height, marked the spot.

Half a mile west of Mr. Truesdale's farm the Erie canal turns abruptly to the west along the brow of the mountain-ridge, and constitutes the northern boundary of George H. Lee's farm. The ridge at this place rises in a gentle swell above the surrounding surface, and, at its highest part, is from sixteen to twenty feet above the canal bottom. The ground was cleared in 1818, by David Oviatt, of a dense forest of beech and maple, many of the trees being full thirty inches in diameter. Not the slightest trace of former settlement of human occupation of the ground existed. In 1820 or 1822 the Erie canal was constructed through the northern slope of this ridge. During the work some twenty skeletons were exhumed from the ground directly beneath the stumps of the forest trees. The soil is composed of from six to twelve inches of black mould overlying a bed of clay, very compact when *in situ*, but loose-grained and easily crumbled when exposed to the atmosphere. So tenacious is the character of this clay bed, excluding to a great degree both air and water, that all larger bones of the skeletons were preserved in perfect form, from skull to instep inclusive; some of them being carefully uncovered and the bones laid in their natural order on the ground, measured from seven feet

upward.⁷ No article of any description was found in the graves. In 1879 a beautiful clingstone ax was plowed up in a field near the ancient burial ground. It is very hard, gives forth a clear metallic sound when struck, and the edge is as finely beveled as a steel ax of modern make. It is a splendid specimen of polished stone workmanship, ten and a half inches long, two and a half wide and one and a half inches thick.

Dependent as certain of these statements are upon the results of future reasearch for a correct understanding of their relative worth and bearing, the advance of specific conclusions regarding the subject in question might appear unwise; but, while the discovery of lately existing monuments and traces of a people superior to the red men in physical structure, the mythology of the latter and other evidence of a similar nature serve to strengthen a personal belief in the pre-Indian occupation of our home territory, the facts presented, and many matters not here shown, are but minor paragraphs of a volume of cumulative evidence that might be compiled

CHAPTER IV

Puzzling as the remains of the Mound-builders prove to the archaeologist, the early history of their Indian successors is no less a problem to the historian. Nearly four centuries have elapsed since Europeans came into personal intercourse with the latter, and half a million of the race still exist upon American soil, yet their origin is buried in the depths of a gloom so profound that no man has ever traced it to its source.

The length of time our Indian predecessors have occupied this continent has never been ascertained, though it is unquestionably a fact that they were not indigenous. The weight of evidence thus far favors the theory of Asiatic descent, but in "the absence of written, pictorial, or sculptural history it is impossible to trace clearly the connection between wandering savages and their remote ancestry."⁸ Centuries of nomadic and climatic changes have effectually obliterated direct proof of such connections, and Indian mythology asserts the origin of many tribes as local to their habitation.

The Senecas ascribe their origin to a great hill at the head of Canandaigua Lake, but Morgan explains that "by this legendary invention they designed to convey an impression of the remoteness of the period of their first occupation of New York,"⁹ and presents other traditional evidences showing the lower St. Lawrence¹⁰ to have been the earliest known abode of the original families from which the Six Nations were descended. These ancient people were of the Huron-Iroquois stock. They were expelled from the lower St. Lawrence by the Algonkins, to whom they had been subject, and migrated westward up the river. Entering Lake Ontario they coasted the south shore in search of a suitable place to locate. Historical accounts of this migration vary

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... [I]t is believed that all nations and tribes of red men who occupied the country between Canandaigua lake and Lake Erie, the Alleghany mountains and Lake Ontario, were offshoots of the Senecas; that the dispersed families in time grew into tribal communities and were known by various names. Those who settled about the mountains to the south were called Andastes, Canestogas, etc. Those who dwelt along the shore of the lake were known as the Eries, and northeast of them were the Attiwandaronks. Philologists assert that the languages of all these people, so far as can be ascertained, differed but little from the Seneca tongue; but it is certain that long anterior to the white man's intrusion on the soil of Western New York they had become nations distinct from the Seneca [T]he famous league of the Five Nations was formed at a period not long subsequent to the dispersion, but in the loose chronology of the Indians' verbal history no definite idea of dates can be obtained. It is only by comparison with some contemporary event recorded in the annals of civilization, that the time of the occurrence can be fixed. Morgan places the origin of the league in 1459,¹¹ and this date is in accordance with deductions of later historians.

The founder of the league was an Onondaga chieftain named Hiawatha, who succeeded in uniting the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas in one great family, whose

bond of common interest was strengthened by ties of blood. To the English they were known as the Five Nations. By the French they were called the Iroquois, and that name was applied to all the members of the league. The native name of the confederacy is given differently by historians, but all agree upon its signification Morgan, whose knowledge of the Six Nations was acquired from the Senecas, states that after the formation of the league, the Iroquois called themselves the Ho-de-no-sau-nee, which signifies "the people of the long house." It grew out of the circumstance that they likened their confederacy to a long house, having partitions and separate fires, after their ancient method of building houses, within which the several nations were sheltered under one roof. The eastern door was on the Hudson river, the western door at the Genesee. The federation was simply for common defense, and each nation or canton was a sovereign republic, composed of clans, governed by its own chiefs and sachems. No enterprise of importance was ever undertaken, either by the league, or by individual nations, without first considering the matter in council. The great councils of the league were held at Onondaga, but each nation and tribe had a particular location for its council fire, which was always lighted before deliberations began. The primeval council fire of the Senecas was at Genundawah, near the head of Canandaigua lake, and in the light of its steady flame were formed the first war parties of the nation. From Genundawah the Senecas went forth upon their first expeditions against tribes to the west, and there the victorious warriors were welcomed home from battle with all the pomp of barbaric fashion.

.....

. . . Within the historical period the council fire of the nation kindled at Genendawah has illumined the gloomy forest at Ga-o-sa-eh-ga-aah near Victor, gleamed brightly in the pleasant valley of the Genesee, and cast its expiring light over the shattered remnants of this once mighty people at Lake Erie; yet for nearly three centuries after Columbus kissed the ocean-laved sands of San Salvador, the Senecas held possession

and control of the land originally occupied by them in the Genesee country, erected their rude cabins on its watercourses, roamed its hills and dales, hunted through its forest glades, lived, fought and died brave, lordly masters of the soil inherited from their fathers, whose crumbling bones the plow of the pale face still upturns as the seasons of harvest recur.

CHAPTER V

Here Harris reviews the Indian terminology for the Genesee River and Irondequoit Bay. He also discusses the key features of seventeenth and eighteenth century maps of the region made by French and British explorers.

CHAPTER VI

While the march of civilization had advanced beyond the Genesee to the north and west, the hunting-grounds of the Senecas were still in their primitive state, and the cycle of a century is not yet complete since the white man came into actual possession of the land and became acquainted with its topographical features. To the pale-faced adventurer of the seventeenth century to whom all this vast territory was an unexplored blank, viewing the land from his birchen canoe on Lake Ontario, the bays, rivers and larger creeks presented the only feasible routes by which it could be entered and traversed, yet, once within its borders, the hardy explorer found the country marked by an intricate net-work of foot paths which spread in every direction. These dark wood lanes unknown to civilized man, their soil heretofore pressed only by the feet of Indians and wild beasts, will ever be known in history as the "trails of the Genesee." They were the highways and by-ways of the native inhabitants, the channels of communication between nations, tribes and scattering towns, in which there was a never-ceasing ebb and flow of humanity.

The origin of these trails and the selection of the routes pursued were natural results of the every-day necessities and inclinations of the nomadic race first inhabiting the land, and time had gradually fashioned the varying interests of successive generations into a crude system of general thoroughfares to which all minor routes led. To find the beginning and

end of these grand trails one might traverse the continent in a fruitless search, for like the broader roads of the present white population, many of which follow the old trail courses, the beaten paths extended from ocean to ocean, from the southern point of Patagonia to the country of the Eskimos, where they were lost in the ever-shifting mantle of snow covering the land of ice—and the trails of the Genesee were but a local division of the mighty complication.

In general appearance these roads did not differ in any particular from the ordinary woods or meadow path of the present day. They were narrow and winding, but usually connected the objective points by as direct a course as natural obstacles would permit

The main trail of the Iroquois extended from Hudson, on the Hudson river below Albany, westwardly to Buffalo, crossing the Genesee at Cannawaugus—now Avon. From Canandaigua lake a branch ran northwest to the head of Irondequoit bay, then to the Genesee falls, and along the lake ridge to the Niagara river at Lewiston. This was the grand line of communication between the Five Nations, and the ultimate destination of every other trail in the present state of New York. Along its silent course the swiftest runners of the Iroquois bore their messages of peace or war with a speed and physical endurance incredible

Their wandering, hunter life and habit of intent observation rendered the Iroquois familiar with every foot of land in their territory, enabling them to select the choicest locations for abode. Towns were frequently moved from place to place, new trails worn and old ones abandoned to stray hunters and wild animals. Trails leading to or along the edge of water were usually permanent. Hardly a stream but bore its border line of trail upon either bank. From the shore of Lake Ontario to the headwaters of the Genesee, trails followed every curve of the river as closely as natural obstacles would permit, and branches led up the sides of tributary creeks.

Trails converged on the Genesee in the vicinity of Rochester at two places, the ridge north of the lower falls, and the rapids some eighty rods below the mouth of Red creek. The passage

of the river north of the lower falls was effected in canoes or on rafts; in the absence of either or both, the aboriginal traveler plunged into the water and stemmed the strong current with his brawny arms. Before the white man obstructed its channel with dams the Genesee was one continuous rapid from Red creek to the south line of the present Erie canal aqueduct. An Indian ford existed at a shallow place near the immediate line of the present race-dam, between the jail and weigh-lock, but was never in such general use at the upper ford below Red creek, where the river could be more easily and safely crossed by footmen.

The great trail coming west from Canandaigua on the present route of the Pittsford road divided a few rods east of Allen's creek. The main trail turned to the north over a low ridge, across the present farm of the venerable Charles M. Barnes and down a gully to Allen's creek. The ford was exactly at the arch through which the waters now pass under the great embankment of the New York Central railroad. Following the west bank to a point where the creek turned directly to the right, the trail left the stream and curving gradually to the west along the base of a high bluff ran up a narrow gully to the table-land. Taking a northwest course from this point it passed the brick residence of D. McCarthy, crossed a trail running to the fishing resort on Irondequoit creek and at a distance of one hundred rods again curved to the west along a short slope, striking the line of the present road on the farm of Judge Edmund Kelley. In the side of this slope were numerous springs near which the Indians frequently camped. When the ground was first plowed many Indian relics were found, and also evidences of a former occupation by some large body of white men. At least two bushels of bullets were discovered in one spot, and numerous other indications of the presence of an army.

From these springs a trail ran directly north half a mile and turned east down the hillside to the famous Indian landing on Irondequoit creek. Along this road between the springs and landing was located the famed Tryon's Town, of Gerundegut, founded by Judge John Tryon about 1798. From Tryon's

Town the main trail continued its northwest course to the Thomas road, some rods north of University avenue. From that point the present (old Thomas) road leading to the cobblestone school-house on Culver street, and thence to Norton street, runs on the old trail. Leaving Norton street a short distance east of Goodman, the path crossed a swamp to Hooker's cemetery. The ground in front of Mr. Hooker's residence is said to have been the site of a very ancient fortification. Following the north edge of the elevation the trail crossed North avenue to the Culver farm opposite, and can still be traced through the grove of forest trees to the former location of a large Indian settlement on the sand knolls, half a mile west. From this town the course was due west down the side of Spring brood to the Ridge mounds and Brewer's landing on the Genesee river.

East avenue is located upon the general route of the second trail from Allen's creek westward. It divided near Union street, the principal path turning slightly to the south and ending at the ford near the weighlock. The branch crossed Main street near the liberty pole and struck the river trail in the vicinity of Franklin and North St. Paul streets. Indian huts were scattered about the bluff in that vicinity until 1819.

A trail came from Caledonia springs east by way of Mumford, Scottsville, Chili and Gates to Red creek ford in South Rochester. This was the general thoroughfare from the Indian towns near the Canaseraga creek to the lower Genesee and Lake Ontario. It was down this trail that Butler's rangers fled, after the massacre of Boyd and Parker at Little Beard's Town in 1779, on their way to the mouth of the river.

A path seldom used during the later Seneca occupation ran north from Red creek ford in the general direction of Genesee street, to the head of Deep hollow, around which it curved to the Lake avenue trail. From this path a second came north from the rapids over the course of Plymouth avenue to a spot called Indian spring (near the corner of Spring street and Spring alley in rear of the First Presbyterian church), and followed the little spring creek northeast to the vicinity of Central avenue and Mill street. This trail branched near Atkinson street, the branch running eastward to the ford near the present jail.

From this ford a path ran directly to Indian spring, in the vicinity of which the wigwams of the natives were occasionally set up. It was at the southern extremity of the ridge lying west of this spring that the Senecas made their last sacrifice of the white dog. Lewis H. Morgan is authority for the statement that this ceremony was performed on the ground now occupied by W. S. Kimble's residence on the south side of Troup street, between Eagle street and Caledonia avenue. A third trail turned north from the jail ford and connected with the Plymouth avenue trail near Central avenue, continuing north to Deep hollow, where it was joined by the Genesee street trail. At the present Ridge road on the boulevard the trail separated; the main path running west on the ridge to Lewiston, and the other to the lake shore. The summit of the hill over which Lake avenue passes, near the present residence of Charles J. Burke, was once the site of a large Indian town, and all the slope and low ground east of that place to the river and north to Hanford's landing, was used for camping purposes. There were numerous springs along this hillside, and the Indians obtained flint from a quarry on the edge of the bluff near the river end of Frauenberger avenue. Numerous little heaps of flint chips, half-finished and broken arrow-heads, and other weapons of stone were found in the woods of that locality by the early settlers. Upon these grounds the late Dr. Chester Dewey gathered many valuable relics of the stone age now in the Smithsonian institution.

.....

... From [Hanford's] landing a path ran along the water at the base of the bluff, up the river to the lower falls. At the spot now called Buell's landing, directly opposite Brewer's landing, a path led up the face of the jutting rocks, reaching the table land in the vicinity of the flint quarry, and natives crossing the river often climbed this steep path in preference to the longer route by the lower landing. The first white settlers in this vicinity (Gideon King and others) widened a path leading up the great sloping bank from the old Indian landing north, to a wagon road. In 1798 Eli Granger laid the keel of the *Jemima*, a

schooner of forty tons and the first American vessel built on the Genesee (some say the first built near Lake Ontario), at the foot of this road; the landing, then called King's, now Hanford's became the lake port, and there the steamer Ontario first touched the river bank when she commenced her trips in 1817. From the landing a second path curved up the little promontory on the north side of the dell, and extended around the edge of the cliff to the old fort. From that place it ran up the creek to the main or Ridge trail, which it crossed some distance west of the present boulevard. Continuing along the north bank of the creek to the farm of Samuel Truesdale, where the giant skeleton was exhumed in 1878, it turned west along the mountain ridge, running straight to a spring on the present farm of George H. Lee. Indians came upon this creek and camped in Mr. Truesdale's chestnut grove until 1853.

At the rapids in South Rochester the river passes over a ledge of limestone, and before the dam [*supplying water to the Erie Canal feeder until 1919 ed.*] was constructed the channel was very shallow some sixty rods above and below. On the east bank a flat extended from Red creek north around the base of Oak hill. It was eaten away by the current long years ago, but it originally constituted the east-side landing of the ford. The west end of Elmwood avenue strikes the river just south of the upper edge of the old ford. In early pioneer days there were two or three good springs in the bank of a small creek which entered the river at that point. A prehistoric town, covering all the surface of Oak Hill, once existed there. Stone relics were found on every foot of the ground from the feeder dam to Red creek by the early settlers. In their anxiety to distance Sullivan's soldiers, Butler's men rid themselves of everything possible at this ford. Ammunition and arms were buried in the ground near the springs and concealed in hollow trees in the vicinity. In 1816 Mr. Boughton found ninety-six pounds of bullets in the bottom of a rotten stump. and several other discoveries of bullets, bars of lead, etc., have been made by various parties. [*Butler's Rangers were organized by the British to harass settlements; in this case they hoped to stop Sullivan's Army, but were unsuccessful and fled to Canada.*]

From the springs at the ford the trail ran northeast to the corner of Indian Trail and First avenues in Mount Hope cemetery. At that point it divided, one branch turning sharply to the left, directly up the slope and north over the top of section G to the present Indian Trail avenue, which it entered and thence followed the ridge straight to a spot in front of George Ellwanger's residence, continuing down Mount Hope avenue, South and North St. Paul streets to Brewer's landing. From the latter place it ran near the edge of the high bank to Lake Ontario. On the farm of Daniel Leake traces of an Indian town and burial ground have been discovered and the old path can yet be followed in places through the woods north of the "rifle range." An ancient fortification stood near the ford of a brook which rises in the little vale southeast of Rattlesnake point. It was the ruins of this fort for which Mr. Squier searched in vain about 1848. The Seneca ferrying-place across the river was at the terminus of the trail at about the same location as the present upper ferry at Charlotte. In the brush and wood on the east bank at this point Butler's rangers sought refuge while waiting for the tory Walker to return from Fort Niagara with boats for their removal. The log house afterward occupied by Walker stood a few feet southeast of the angle in the present road where it turns west across the swamp at the ferry. Stone pestles, arrow-heads, bullets, etc., have been found in the vicinity in considerable numbers by Jerome Manning and other old settlers.

From the corner of Indian Trail and First avenues in Mount Hope cemetery the south branch of the trail, coming from Red creek ford, passed a few rods east to a beautiful spring in the side of the present artificial pond [*Sylvan Waters* ed.]. Curving slightly northward it divided, one path following the general course of Stanley street and Highland avenue along the southern base of the hills to the corners north of Cobb's brick-yard on Monroe avenue; the other branch running directly to the summit of the hills near the water-works reservoir [*Highland Reservoir* ed.], and east over the top of Pinnacle hill, joining the first path near the corners. From that place the course was directly east to the riffle on Irondequoit creek some distance

above the dug-way mills. The riffle was a noted resort of the Indians who went there from the upper Genesee to fish. It was known to the Senecas as Sgoh-sa-is-thah. The meaning of the word is "the swell dashes against the precipice," referring to the fact that a heavy swell sometimes beats against the ledge over which the fall pours. Springs still exist in the bank near the riffle where the Indians camped. From this fishing ground a large open path ran directly south over the hills to the Pittsford road, and thence to Honeoye. At its crossing of the New York Central railroad at the "sand-cut" east of the Allen's creek embankment, an Indian burial ground was located. During the excavation of a part of this hill, about 1876, human remains were exhumed, among which were several skeletons of unusual size, one exceeding seven feet in length. Numberless relics of stone, rusty knives and fragments of firearms were picked up by the workmen, Dennis Callahan securing a small flat-iron bearing the figure of a spread eagle. East of this trail, between the cemetery and the Pittsford road, quantities of stone relics have been found, indicating the site of a pre-historic town. West of this site is located the great cairn of limestones, supposed to have been heaped up by people preceding the Indians.

There were two Indian roads known as the portage trails. The first has been described as the Mount Hope avenue and St. Paul street route, over which canoes and baggage were transported between Red creek and Brewer's landing. This route was followed by the Indians long after Rochester was settled by the whites, and Phederus Carter, James Stone, and other pioneer boys often assisted their Indian friends to carry canoes over this path.

The grand portage trail diverged from the Mount Hope avenue path near Clarissa street, ran along the ridge south of and parallel with Gregory street to South avenue, thence straight to Oliver Culver's old homestead, corner of Culver street and East avenue. Passing a few rods east of the house the trail-route was down the north road east to the landing on Irondequoit creek. This was the general highway between the upper Genesee and Irondequoit bay, to which reference has been made in Chapter V. Some years ago an aged Seneca was asked to describe the route of this trail between the Genesee

river and Irondequoit landing. Raising his hand and cleaving the air with a direct forward blow the Indian replied: "Straight as the arrow flies, runs the carrying-path." A verification of this assertion may be found on any map of Monroe county showing the following points: Mount Hope avenue and Clarissa street, South avenue and Grand street, East avenue and the Culver road and the landing on Irondequoit creek. A line extending from the first to the last would pass in as nearly a direct course through the intermediate points as the original form of the ground would admit. From South avenue to East avenue the trail ran over a section of low ground which extended southward to the base of the Pinnacle range of hills, and was known as the "bear swamp."

A huge dome-shaped hill fills the Irondequoit valley directly opposite the old Indian landing-place so often mentioned. The creek hugs the west bank at the landing and sweeps around to the southeast in a great semi-circle called "the ox-bow," leaving a crescent-shaped flat at the southern base of this island hill. when the surrounding slopes were covered with forest trees this flat formed a pleasant and secluded retreat, which could be reached over the landing trail or by crossing the creek, which is very deep in that vicinity. After leaving Red creek ford Butler's rangers separated on Mount Hope, one party proceeding down the Mount Hope avenue trail to the mouth of the Genesee, the other going east to Irondequoit landing and the ox-bow flat, which appears to have been a well known and favorite resort of the Tories. From this hiding-place they made their way over the town of Irondequoit to the mouth of the Genesee river, where they remained in the brush and the woods several days, not daring to build a fire or make the least noise, lest Sullivan's avenging forces should discover and annihilate them. Walker had been sent from Caledonia springs to Niagara for boats, and when he finally arrived in the Genesee the rangers were nearly famished. After one ravenous meal they embarked for Niagara and Oswego, and the lower Genesee was rid of all the murderous gang save Walker, who, remaining as a British spy, built a cabin near the ferrying-place.

The west side of the island hill, facing Irondequoit landing, has yielded to nature's erosive forces, and a charming inclined valley extends from the landing to the very eastern limit of the hilltop, which was once connected with the high land east by a narrow ridge. From the landing the old trail course was up this valley to the elevated table land opposite. Running some distance east to avoid the tremendous gulfs reaching back from the bay, it turned north, ending on the sand-bar at the mouth of Irondequoit bay. From the landing to Lake Ontario every rod of ground is historical. When the farms of Henry Smith and Edson Welcher, just north of the float-bridge road, were settled, an Indian cemetery was discovered. There were two hundred grave-mounds arranged in rows, over which grew oak trees fully eighteen inches in diameter. In the woods near at hand great corn-hills were plainly to be seen, and the Indians had a landing-place on Plum Orchard point, immediately below.

A second trail turned east to the ridge, along which it continued to Sodus and Oswego. It was known to the Senecas as Ne-aga Wa-a-gwen, or Ontario foot-path. The village last occupied by Seneca Indians in Webster was located on the ridge near this path, about one mile east of the bay, and the latter-day Mississaugas camped on the same ground. Their landing was on the bay, at the foot of the ridge. In a hollow north of the landing H. M. Hames discovered twelve skeletons lying in a circle, like the spokes of a wheel, with their feet to the center, where were deposited a number of rude stone weapons, probably arms of the buried warriors. One of these relics, an immense spearhead of flint, is in possession of the writer. It is an interesting fact that while iron weapons, beads and other evidences of association with the whites are occasionally found in graves of the natives on the high land about Rochester, burial-places in hollows or ravines usually contain relics of the stone age only. A mound which was very prominently located on the bluff north of Dunbar hollow was opened by the early residents, who obtained a great number of stone weapons, mostly tomahawks and skull-crackers.

A large fort once occupied the ground just north of the ridge at the intersection of the sand-bar trail. This work is

mentioned by Macauley, but Squier failed to locate it in 1848.¹² DeNonville does not appear to have observed it in 1687, and it was undoubtedly very ancient. Stone arrow-heads discovered there are quite large and broad. Arrow-heads of the same description are found in a dell on the Victor trail. From the old fort a trail ran northeast to a salt-spring located about one and a half miles east of the bay. The Indians came from Gardeau, Mount Morris, Moscow, Geneseo, Lima, Avon and Cannawaugus to make salt at this spring, camping in the woods between it and Irondequoit bay. The tory Walker and an old Seneca chief from Moscow were the last to use it, and in 1788-9 they covered the spring over. They disclosed its location in confidence to three or four white friends, Asa Dunbar being of the number. He revealed it to Wm. H. Penfield, and the latter to Jarvis M. Hatch, from whom the present writer obtained the following quaint directions to effect its re-discovery: "In a large gorge half a mile from the lake shore take a runway to a point one-fourth of a mile southwest of the gorge. The spring is near some trees in a cultivated field, entirely covered over and effectually concealed. I have been to it in 1860." There was another spring in Dunbar hollow, which is so called from the fact that Asa Dunbar, an early settler of gigantic strength, frequented the place to manufacture salt. The process was very simple, the brine being boiled in a "three-pail kettle."

Two mounds once occupied the hilltop south of the Sea Breeze hotel on the west side of Irondequoit bay. The former location was pointed out to the writer in 1880 by Charles M. Barnes and Amos Knapp. The mounds were from twenty to thirty-five feet east of north of the present wooden "observatory." Squier says they were small, the largest not exceeding five feet in height. Upon excavation he found they had been previously disturbed, and his examination resulted in the discovery of a few fragments of bone, charcoal, pottery and arrow-heads.¹³ Old settlers inform me that Wm. H. Penfield opened these mounds about 1817. He obtained many curious things, including sword scabbard-bands of silver, belt buckles, belt and hat ornaments and other articles of military dress. Directly

east of these mounds is a deep gully, now crossed by two rustic bridges. The Indian canoe landing was at the mouth of this gully, where a fine spring furnished good water. A trail came up the hill from the sand-bar west of the mounds along the edge of the gully to its beginning. A few rods east of this point was a burial-place where Indian remains are still found. The gully or landing trail united with the other, ran southwest to the ridge in the vicinity of the Forest House, and due south to the west end of the float-bridge road, where it joined the trail already described, leading to the camping-ground on Judge Kelley's farm and onward through the Allen's creek "defile" to the Pittsford road. This was the main trail, west of the bay, from Lake Ontario to Irondequoit landing, Victor and Honeoye creek, and DeNonville marched down this path from Allen's creek on his return to the lake.

The small island on the west side of Irondequoit bay, upon which the Schneider House stands, is of artificial origin. It was originally of ellipsoidal form, ninety feet long, thirty-two wide and seventeen high. In his preparations to build, Mr. Schneider lowered the whole island to within two feet of the surface of the water, first removing a dead oak tree about fifteen inches through, which stood on the very top of the elevation. The mound was composed of alternate layers of sand and clay so distinctly marked as to attract attention. In the bottom of the exact center, fifteen feet below the surface, Mr. Schneider unearthed about one bushel of hand-worked stones consisting of arrow and spear heads, knives, tomahawks of various shapes, skull-crackers, war-club heads, fish-net weights, skin-dressers, finishers, etc. Some of these articles were beautiful specimens of polished-stone work and nearly all above the average size usually found in this vicinity. The construction of this mound cost a vast amount of labor, and the object is conjectural. It marked the entrance to a small bay which undoubtedly constituted a fine harbor extending back into a great valley. It is a secluded locality, immense forest trees still standing about the shore, but was once frequented by the native inhabitants. A brawling stream curves through the valley bottom and enters the little bay, which has become nearly impassable by

the growth of rushes. A trail extended the whole length of the valley and the old path is yet quite distinct in places. It followed the original upward course of the stream to the north end of Culver street. A trail left the creek at the head of the valley and ran south across the float-bridge road some two miles to the Irondequoit creek landing and Genesee falls trail, which it crossed near the old Thomas road, and continued up the bank of a creek to the portage trail at Oliver Culver's old homestead on East Avenue. Numberless side paths connected these principal trails at intervals, and threaded the forest in every direction to springs, deer-licks, and other places of interest to the native inhabitants. Other trails will be mentioned in their proper connections, but many interesting facts are omitted, enough having already been presented to prove that a numerous population occupied the territory of the lower Genesee long before the white man came upon its soil.

In the following nine chapters Harris relates the story of the early French missions, the work of La Salle, the punitive Denonville expedition, and the history of Totiakton and the Seneca's revenge. He then describes Sullivan's expedition and the Indian withdrawal to Fort Niagara.

Many of the veterans of Sullivan's expedition carried back to their homes wonderful stories of western New York, its forests, meadows, and valuable water courses. Their reports helped begin a wave of settlement. Harris explains how the Indian land titles were extinguished, and begins the story of the early settlers with great detail about Ebenezer Allan and the One Hundred Acre Tract.

He continues with a narration of the lives of pioneers like the Fishes, the Stones, Charles Harford, and of his own grandfathers, Jacob Miller and Daniel Harris. In his last chapter he draws on knowledge gained in close contact with the Reynolds family to give a detailed description of early mail facilities in Rochester.

* * * *

This overview of Harris' contribution to Peck's *Semi-Centennial History* illustrates his tremendous dedication to fact finding and research. His interests drew him into ever-widening fields of study which included geology, history, archaeology, and anthropology.

In the days before any permanent museum was established in Rochester, Harris served as a kind of traveling museum. When he delivered his lecture on "The Aboriginal History of Irondequoit" he carried along over 1,000 artifacts to illustrate his talk.

When he delivered a short lecture to the Cornhill Chatauqua in 1887 Harris displayed about a dozen artifacts. Several of the topics he covered he had discussed at greater length in the *Semi-Centennial History*. Here we have the opportunity to hear Harris in the less formal style of the lecture room as he touches on aspects of his favorite subject, local aboriginal occupation.

Harris' remarks at the Cornhill Chatauqua are transcribed from the manuscript original in the Harris Collection of the Local History Division of the Rochester Public Library. The large, worn, foolscap sheets contain numerous corrections and paste-overs. Pencilled notations, apparently added by Harris at a later time, are indicated in this text by special brackets {}. But most of the corrections, in ink like the body of the original, are incorporated here as original text.

{Cornhill Chatauqua}

The chairman has announced that I will speak upon "The Aboriginal History of America," but that is a subject which covers broad ground. One could hardly enter into an intelligent outline of the matter in an informal talk of twenty minutes. It would seem better, and probably more satisfactory to this home body, to discuss the division of the subject in which we are all more particularly interested—namely, local history. Even on this branch of the subject our time will admit only a general reference to certain matters of special interest; and a personal examination of a few curiosities connected with those matters may add to the interest awakened by a dry recital of historical facts.

In his notes of a journey through the state of New York about 1845, for the purpose of inspecting aboriginal sites and localities____Schoolcraft, the historian, makes this brief mention of "Rochester: Nothing left here of the footprints of the race—all covered deep and high with brick and stone. Whole valley of the Genesee worthy of examination in all its length and branches. Wants the means of an antiquarian society to do this."

What a mine of historic wealth Schoolcraft left untouched! The valley of the Genesee, and its vicinity, affords ample opportunity for the historian to illustrate every phase of American aboriginal life, from the earliest mention of human existence here, to the departure from the banks of our beautiful river of the last blanketed son of the forest.

The shore of Lake Ontario, Irondequoit bay and valley, the Genesee river, Braddocks bay, Black creek, and nearly every

stream and valley, every hillock and plain, have their old time history and are eloquent with voices of the past.

If one would awaken their silent voices and listen to their tales of thrilling interest, he should study our pioneer, colonial, and Indian history. He must learn the course of the trails or paths through which the early inhabitants threaded the aisles of the forest, search out their woodland retreats, and examine their old sites of settlement for relics that illustrate their ways of life.

Extending his researches beyond the date of man's appearance here, the student will find much of interest in the natural history of our surroundings. The desire to learn all that is possible of our pleasant valley home, will lead him to note the peculiar features of the country and enquire the reason to this, the cause of that, or the origin of other prominent landmarks.

The "lake ridge" is a familiar term to all citizens of Rochester; and there are, doubtless, none present who have not seen the deep channel of the Genesee river, which forms its outlet through the heart of the city to Lake Ontario.

To understand the origin of the lake ridge and river channel, we must go back to that period of geological time when all this part of the world was covered by a mighty ocean.

As the continent of America rose, the waters of the ocean retired into the depressions of the earth and formed the seas and lakes. The basin of the St. Lawrence which extends from the gulf of St. Lawrence to the headwaters of the Mississippi—a distance of two thousand miles—formed the first reservoir. This, in time, was divided by natural barriers into three sub-basins. The first of these has an area of about 90,000 square miles, more than one fourth of which is occupied by the waters of Lake Superior. The second, or middle, basin has an area of 160,000 square miles and contains Lakes Huron, Michigan and Erie in its lowest depressions. The third or lowest basin has an area of 260,000 square miles and is covered in part by the waters of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence river.

The waters of the upper and middle basins were at first discharged down the Mississippi valley to the gulf of Mexico. In time the north-eastern shores of Lake Erie near Buffalo

were broken through and the Niagara river became the outlet of the upper basins. Lake Ontario had previously receded to about the level of Rochester, and {the drainage of the upper basins through} the Niagara river {caused} the water to again rise, forming a great ridge which extends all along the south side of Lake Ontario into Canada, and is known as the "lake ridge." The outlet of Lake Ontario was then through the Mohawk valley and Hudson river, but in time a great barrier at the lower end of the lake gave way, the waters were turned down the St. Lawrence channel, and the lake was reduced to its present level at Charlotte. [*In the light of later science, Harris' explanation of the Ridge's formation and other parts of his geology are oversimplified.* ed.]

If the water at New York should rise 247.25 feet it would place the Atlantic ocean on a level with Lake Ontario. 441 feet would bring the mean level with the lake ridge and cover the lower Genesee falls. At 508 feet the water would be level with the Erie canal aqueduct in Rochester: 537.58 feet with Lake Erie; and 600 feet would carry the surface to Lake Superior and reestablish the great ocean from Labrador to the gulf of Mexico.

Rochester would be submerged but 92 feet at the aqueduct; the tops of many buildings would remain above the water; Pinnacle hill would be a conical island 71 feet high; and the water works fountain and Mt. Hope would form a cluster of low islands.

When the waters of the ocean first retired the Pinnacle and Mount Hope range of hills formed a great dam at the mouth of the Genesee valley, and created a lake extending from Rochester to Dansville. When this dam was broken through, the rush of waters excavated the valley of Irondequoit bay, which was the original mouth of the Genesee river. At a later period the waters were diverted into the channel they now occupy in their passage through Rochester to Charlotte.

While excavations were being made under Reynolds Arcade last {1886} spring, the remains of a pine stump and log were uncovered. The stump stood on the bedrock, the log was about one foot above. The wood was thoroughly rotted, only one small piece remaining sound. The rock at this point is

twenty feet below the surface of East Main street, and covered with ten feet of mixed sand and clay *in situ*. Two feet above the stump is a thick stratum of blue clay, and above that silt, showing that the tree and the log were covered during the geological epoch in which the soil was deposited by water.

Later a second stump, several pieces of which were secured, was found near the first. From all the natural indications, these trees grew on the site of Rochester when the waters of Lake Ontario covered the lower fall; and the fragment of the stump {No 1} here presented, must be several thousand years old.

It is conjectured that the mound builders flourished {over} 1,000 years ago, and were contemporary with the king of beasts—the mastadon. In his interesting history of *Ancient Man in America*, Dr. Larkin says that in 1859, he found, on the Red House creek, a tributary of the Allegany, a piece of native copper on which was engraved the form of an elephant in harness; showing that the elephant or mastadon, was tamed and employed in labor, by the mound builders. Dr. Larkin furnishes other evidence, of a similar nature, respecting the relations of the mound builders and mastadon.

The entire Genesee country was once inhabited by the mastadon, and remains of several of those ponderous animals—besides which Jumbo was but a baby—have been discovered in Rochester. In 1837 portions of a mastadon were dug out of the bed of the valley canal under Plymouth Avenue bridge; and about four years ago the atlas of the huge beast was found under the old towpath, and is now in Ward's Museum.

The relic {No 3} before you is a piece of the tusk of a mastadon found at Nunda one year ago.

From the deductions of our eminent scientists, it is supposed that Niagara river was created about eight thousand years ago; and the lake ridges and deep channel of the lower Genesee are not far from that age. As man occupied this locality at that early period, the "oldest resident" of Rochester, if he was still living, would be a pretty venerable person: yet, for ought we know to the contrary, his eyes may have rested on this piece of stone {No 2} which came from near the old fire place in Gaines.

Our next trace of human presence in the vicinity of Rochester is found in the monuments of an unknown people, whom I suppose to have been of the class termed "mound builders." The name is derived from the mounds which mark the seats of their settlements: but their record as a people constitutes a problem in ancient history which no person has ever solved.

It has been generally supposed, and asserted by historians, that the mound builders did not extend their settlement into New York beyond the tributary sources of the Allegany river; but I believe that this ancient people occupied the country about Rochester, and extended east of the Genesee. Several mounds, of the same peculiar form and construction as those found in the great south-western valleys, have existed in Rochester and its suburbs. Two of these mounds were located on the lake ridge, at its terminus on top of the east bluff of the Genesee river, at Brewer's landing, and were recently entirely destroyed in digging for sand.

An enormous arm bone, a mound builders pipe, a broken stone knife, and human skull, {No 4} {No 5} were taken from one of these mounds during its destruction. The skull was buried in the side of the mound, and evidently belonged to a race later than the people who constructed the mound.

While removing the second mound in 1882, the laborers unearthed a skeleton of such large proportions that some thought it could not be the remains of a human being.

"It's a giant!" said one.

"It's *not* a man!" said another.

"Let's break it to pieces and find out!" said they.

So they smashed the bones into fragments, and the chance for investigation was forever lost.

With these relics I exhibit one other article peculiar to the mound builders. It is a weather beaten stone nearly the size and shape of an egg, with a rim or collar, worked out at the top. The use of this prehistoric article is a puzzle to historians, though many theories have been advanced regarding it.

The stone {No 6} was found in Rochester, and is one of several matters of which I am not, at present, prepared to say more. I can only add that they are from the most ancient trails in the vicinity of Rochester.

The accompanying articles were found 15 feet below the surface of an artificial mound—known as Snyder's Island—in Irondequoit bay. {No 7}

The mound builders were succeeded by the red men, and the relics of the latter are the more numerous; yet there can be little doubt that many remains ascribed to the Indian were really of mound-builder origin. Weapons of stone were first used by primitive man, and the leaf-shaped arrow head has retained its original form from time immemorial.

I have a few arrowheads {No 8} which have been exposed to the weather so long, that they are like chalk; yet, in all other respects, they do not differ materially from stone points found on late Indian sites.

It is generally believed that the Indians dispossessed the mound builders of this country about one thousand years ago; and it is positively known that Indians possessed our eastern seacoasts in 985, when Bjarni, an Icelandic navigator, discovered Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Nantucket.

When the white man first visited the interior of New York, the fierce Senecas claimed all the land bordering the east bank of the Genesee.

This tribe was one of the original five nations that, about 1459, formed an alliance known as the League of the Iroquois. The Iroquois likened their confederacy to a long house, extending from the Hudson to the Genesee, and called themselves Ho-de-no-dau-nee, or "people of the long house." The Mohawks on the Hudson and the Senecas on the Genesee were considered door keepers of the house, the Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas—and later the Tuscaroras—occupying intermediate positions.

The country west of the lower Genesee river was owned by a people whom the Senecas called "Kah-kwas," the Hurons termed "Atti-wan-o-da-ronks," and the French named "Neutrals." This was a powerful nation, that maintained a strict neutrality in all the quarrels and wars of surrounding tribes. They established a place of refuge at a fort called Gan-stran-yea, on the present Tuscarora reservation near Lewiston. Any refugee who reached this fort was safe from all further

pursuit; thereafter the pursued and pursuer must go their respective ways in peace.

According to the tradition of Johnson, a native historian of the Tuscaroras, the people at the fort were ruled by a queen, whose official title as peace-maker, was Ge-keah-san-sa. She treacherously delivered certain Seneca refugees to their enemies; and, in revenge, the Iroquois destroyed the Kah-kwas. {No 9 This piece of wood was dug out of the embankment of the ancient fort.} The office of queen of Gan-stran-yea remained vacant until 1878, when the Senecas and Tuscaroras selected Caroline Parker, a sister of Genl. Eli Parker, and ordained her to the high station. Miss Parker became the wife of the late John Mt. Pleasant, chief of the Tuscaroras; and still resides at Tuscarora, where her hospitable home is ever open to all who come. As a proof of this {No 10} my daughter claims these trifles of beadwork as a pleasant reminder of her visit to the Queen, Ge-keah-san-sa, of Gah-stran-yea.

Morgan says the Kah-kwas were subdued by the Senecas about 1651.

In 1655 The Senecas overthrew the Eries, who owned the country on Lake Erie south-west of the Kah-kwas, and thus became sole possessors of the Genesee valley.

It will never be known when the white man first trod the banks of the Genesee; but we have records showing his presence on its headwaters in 1615; and French and Dutch traders were familiar with the watercourses of western New York during the first half of the 17th century. Chaumonot, a French priest, preached to the Senecas in 1656; and Jesuit missions were after established in several Seneca towns.

In 1687, the Marquis Denonville, governor of Canada, landed an army of some three thousand French troops and savages, on the sand bar at the mouth of Irondequoit bay, built a temporary fort there, marched through the interior and destroyed the Seneca villages. Many of the old town sites are known, but the records of Priests and soldiers were so meager and imperfect that the identity of certain towns destroyed by Denonville has never been positively established.

At the date of Denonville's invasion the Seneca towns were principally in Victor, Bloomfield, Mendon, Lima, and that locality. Subsequently the Senecas were found farther south and east, and on the Genesee near Avon and Geneseo; but I have evidence to show that in the interim, villages were established about Irondequoit bay, and later, in the vicinity of Rochester. The old Indian trails crossed the city like a network, and the location of many of their temporary camping places can be pointed out.

During the revolutionary war the Senecas espoused the British cause, and their towns in the Genesee valley became rendezvous from which tory rangers and savage warriors sallied forth to depredate the frontier settlements.

In 1779 Washington sent General Sullivan, with an army of 2,000 men, to punish the Indians. Sullivan marched through the forests from Easton Penn. to Geneseo and Cuylerville on the Genesee, defeated the British and Indians, destroyed all the Seneca settlements, and broke the power of the nation.

The first pioneers of the Genesee valley were soldiers of Sullivan's army, who had obtained a knowledge of the country during their campaign against the Senecas.

Soon after the revolution the Indians ceded their lands in western New York to the whites, retaining certain small reservations for their own habitation. Several of these reservations have since been purchased by the whites. Today the Senecas number about 3,000 souls, located on the Allegany, Cattaraugus and Tonawanda reservations.

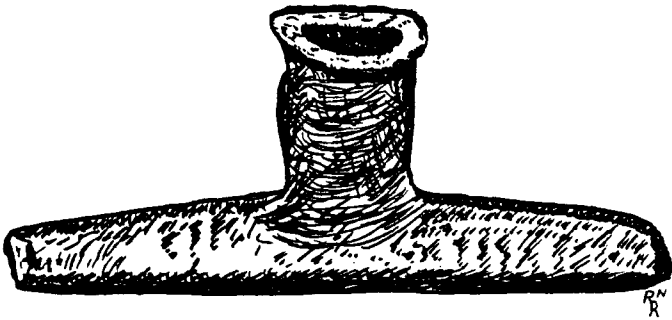
The character of the relics found on the site of an ancient Indian settlement to a certain extent determines its history. Before the coming of the white man, the weapons and utensils of the Indians consisted of stone, bone, clay and products of native workmanship. When a town site is discovered on which the relics are all of this class, it is termed prehistoric.

The white people introduced the use of weapons and utensils of metal, and the savages were not slow to adopt them. As early as 1750 the Indian tribes of New York possessed fire arms, and had generally discarded their own primitive productions of stone, bone, and clay. The remains from town sites occupied

since the 15th century are usually mixed with articles of European or white manufacture, such as knife blades, tomahawks, gun barrels, etc. of iron; kettles, arrow points, rings and other ornaments of brass and copper. Wood, cloth, and other perishable materials have long ago yielded to decay.

Nearly all the old town sites have been picked clean by curiosity hunters, and only the broken and finer relics remain; yet to the antiquary each bit of dingy pottery, every weapon of stone, every article of metal—however small and apparently insignificant to the unobservant person, possesses some point of interest regarding the people from whom it emanated. These old relics are the voices of the past. The arrow points, the rusty axes, the bits of modeled clay, are leaves of a book in which the antiquary reads the Alpha and Omega of a primitive race. They are the remains of a people who, but a century ago, held absolute sway in the Genesee valley; a people whose record as barbarians is brightened by characteristics and noble deeds, they would crown a civilized nation with honor.

* * * *



Stone pipe from the ridge mound in Rochester

Exhibited by Harris and illustrated in the *Semi-Centennial History*. . . , p. 25.

What did Harris contribute to our knowledge of Rochester's earliest inhabitants?

Many of the researchers who followed Harris have referred to his work. They include William Beauchamp, Harrison Follette, William Ritchie, and Arthur C. Parker.

Harris' dedication in searching out Indian trails and systematically classifying artifacts which he found at key sites has left us with a legacy of knowledge of the earliest inhabitants that might have been lost forever as city boundaries expanded, living areas became densely populated, and industrial sites increased. The lists of artifacts (if not the artifacts themselves) which are available in the Harris Collection at the Rochester Public Library provide clues for individuals interested in Rochester neighborhood history or early native occupation. Some of the sites Harris explored might yet yield additional information for future archeologists.

The Harris collection of artifacts was available for study until about 1938. If the now-missing collection can be found it could shed new light on those who inhabited our area, based on the archeological insight developed in the last fifty years.

In a tribute to George Harris, John Norton wrote:

Mr. Harris had a striking and attractive personality and a charm of manner that won all hearts. In contemplating his character we are impressed by its symmetry and completeness as measured by the high ideals of what a man should be.

... He was a true lover of nature and found the fields, the woods, and the streams a never ending source of delight. His keen eye was sure to detect any sign of an Indian trail, or village site, and his judgment in such matters was well-nigh infallible. No student of nature ever brought to his work a more honest purpose to be guided by the actual and unbiased truth. His search for facts was not to support some pet theory but to add to his store of knowledge and enable him to reach a true solution.

... Men eminent in learning counted the moments precious they could spend in communing with him of the secrets that time had hidden from common eyes. The farmer felt a new interest in the fields he tilled after listening to the graphic recital of Indian warfare or pioneer adventure that the researches of Mr. Harris located within his boundaries. The dusky sons of the forest loved him as a brother and sought his aid, his counsel, and his hospitality as freely as though he was by birth instead of by adoption a member of their tribe.¹⁵

Rochester owes much to George H. Harris, "Ho-tar-shan-nyoh"—the PATHFINDER.

Notes

1. George H. Harris, **Autobiography** [ms.], Harris Collection, Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester.
2. Howard L. Osgood, "Memorial," Rochester Historical Society **Publications**, 9 (1930), 109-111.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. R. E. Lawton quoted in Osgood, *op. cit.*
6. Orsamus Turner, **History . . . of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase** (Rochester, 1851), p. 428, quoted by Harris in William F. Peck, **Semi-Centennial History of the City of Rochester** (Syracuse, 1884), p. 22.
7. Jarvis M. Hatch, **Junior Pioneer Historical Collections**, p. 29, cited by Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
8. Edward Fontaine, **How the World was Peopled**, quoted by Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
9. Lewis Henry Morgan, **League of the . . . Iroquois** (New York, 1851), p. 7, quoted by Harris, *loc. cit.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 5; Harris, *loc. cit.*, also cites Cadwallader Colden, **History of the Five Nations**, p. 23, and David Cusick, **Ancient History of the Six Nations**, p. 16.
11. Morgan, **Systems of Consanguinity** . . . (Washington, 1870), p. 151, cited by Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
12. Ephraim G. Squier, **Aboriginal Monuments of the State of New York** (Washington, 1849), p. 58, cited by Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
13. Squier, *op. cit.*, p. 57, cited by Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
14. Harris Collection, Local History Division, Rochester Public Library, Case 7, Box 7, No. 64.
15. RHS **Publications**, 6 (1927), 140.