

**Hutchins Report - Brothertown**

A  
History  
of  
Brothertown

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**Introduction**

The history of Brothertown is of interest for three principal reasons. Firstly, Brothertown was the culminating project of one of the giants of eighteenth century North America, Samson Occom. Like Benjamin Franklin, Samson Occom was a celebrity on both sides of the Atlantic long before the American Revolution. Also like Franklin, Occom greatly enhanced an already illustrious career by his activities during the Revolution.

Secondly, because it was founded during the American Revolution, Brothertown can throw new light on this chaotic era. Brothertown was one of the most significant initiatives undertaken in an era marked by bold departures. In a number of respects, Brothertown was unique.

Thirdly, because Brothertown was unique, it underscores the diversity of tribes and tribally-descended groups in the eastern United States at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is often assumed that all such Native American groups remained discrete entities since “time immemorial”---as if descending through separate tubes from aboriginal times to the present. This obscures the dynamism of Native American history, and belittles the accomplishments of distinctive leaders of tribal origin. Occom began life as a member of a tribe, but became convinced that tribes were constricting social forms and went on to found a community whose members left their tribes, many of which were historically hostile to one another, to join a post-tribal community organized on a non-tribal basis as a New England-style town.

I

**Concept: New England Origins, 1700-1784**

**Samson Occom: An Eighteenth Century North American Life.**

Like Benjamin Franklin, Samson Occom composed a remarkable autobiography about his early life in pre-Revolutionary North America. But although born not far from Boston, where Franklin was born in 1706, Occom began his North American life in 1723 in quite different circumstances. "I was Born a Heathen," recounted Occom,

and Brought up in Heathenism till I was between 16 and 17 years of age, at a Place Called Mohegan, in New London, Connecticut in New England. My Parents lived a wandering life as did all the Indians at Mohegan. They Chiefly Depended upon Hunting, Fishing and Fowling for their Living and had no connection with the English, excepting to Traffic with them in their small trifles and they strictly maintained and followed their Heathenish ways, customs and Religion. Neither did we cultivate our Land nor keep any Sort of Creatures, except Dogs which we used in Hunting, and we Dwelt in Wigwams. These are a sort of Tent, covered with Matts made of Flags [reeds]. And to this Time we were unacquainted with the English Tongue in general, though there were a few who understood a little of it.<sup>1</sup>

As Occom here implies, much was soon to change for both Occom and his tribe. A major reason was the Great Awakening of 1740, at which time Occom was "between 16 and 17 years of age."

When I was 16 years of age, we heard a strange Rumor among the English that there were extraordinary Ministers Preaching from Place to Place and a Strange Concern among the White People. This was in the Spring of the Year. But we saw nothing of these things till Some Time in the Summer, when Some ministers began to visit us and Preach the Word of God; and the Common People also came frequently and exhorted us to the things of God which it pleased the Lord, as I humbly hope, to Bless and accompany with Divine Influences to the Conviction and Saving Conversion of a Number of us, amongst whom I was one that was Impresst with the things we had heard.<sup>2</sup>

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1 William DeLoss Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1899, 23-24.

2 Love 34.

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Such evangelizing was “extraordinary” at a time when the established Connecticut church was rigorously doctrinal and liturgical. Members of tribes would not have felt welcome at an “ordinary” colonial church service. Evangelists bringing the Great Awakening to Mohegan wigwams emphasized personal salvation and a religion of the heart rather than orthodoxy of belief and conventionality of conduct. Occom

went to all the meetings I could come at, and continued under Trouble of Mind about 6 months, at which time I began to Learn the English Letters, got me a Primer and used to go to my English Neighbours frequently for Assistance in Reading, but went to no School. And when I was 17 years of age I had, as I trust, a Discovery of the way of Salvation through Jesus Christ and was enabled to put my trust in him alone for Life and Salvation. From this Time the Distress and Burden of my mind was removed, and I found Serenity and Pleasure of Soul in Serving God. By this time I just began to Read in the New Testament without Spelling, and I had a Stronger Desire Still to Learn to read the Word of God, and at the Same Time had an uncommon Pity and Compassion to my Poor Brethren According to the Flesh. I used to wish I was Capable of Instructing my poor Kindred. I used to think if I could once Learn to Read I would Instruct the poor Children in Reading and used frequently to talk with our Indians Concerning Religion. Thus I continued till I was in my 19<sup>th</sup> year, and by this Time I could Read a little in the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

Occom next began regular instruction in English, Latin, Greek and Hebrew with a Connecticut clergyman, Eleazer Wheelock, with whom Occom maintained a conflicted association until Wheelock’s death in 1779.

From 1749 until 1761, Occom served as a school teacher for the small Montauk tribe resident at the eastern end of Long Island. James and Esther Fowler were leaders in this community. In 1751, Occom married their daughter Mary Fowler. Two of her younger brothers, David Fowler, born in 1735, and Jacob Fowler, born in 1750, began as Occom’s students and ultimately became his assistants.

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3 Love 34.

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In 1759, Occom was ordained a minister, in anticipation of his assuming a more responsible and better-paying position.<sup>4</sup>

### **Occom, the Oneidas and Sir William Johnson, 1761-1766.**

Accompanied by David Fowler, Occom traveled to the Oneida Country in 1761 to explore the possibility of his becoming a missionary there. En route, the two young tribesmen called on Sir William Johnson, Royal Superintendent of Northern Indian Affairs, at Johnson Hall in what is now Johnstown, New York. Occom presented his "Recommendatory Letters" on July 3, 1761, and was "very Kindly Entertained by his Honor." According to Occom, Sir William "Promised me his Assistance as Need Should Require, he was exceeding free with me in conversation" for "about two Hours" and held out the prospect of further conversation, as he was himself about to head west to the Oneida Country on his way to Detroit "with five Battows [boats] Laden with Presents for the Indians." Occom and David Fowler departed Johnson Hall, but Sir William caught up with them on July 6. On July 7, Occom and Fowler observed as Sir William held several conferences with the Oneidas in a futile attempt to persuade them to hand over for punishment an Oneida who had killed "a Dutchman" (presumably a German from German Flats). The Oneidas, Occom related,

Insisted upon an old agreement that was Settled between them and the English formerly, that if any Such Accident Should ever happen between them in Peaceable Times, they Shou'd make it up in an Amicable manner without shedding of Blood. But Sir William told them it was the Comand of General Amherst, that the murderer Shou'd be delivered up to Justice---but the Indians said that murderer was gone off no body knows where etc.<sup>5</sup>

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4 John W. De Forest, *History of the Indians of Connecticut from the Earliest Known Period to 1850*, Hartford: William James Hamersley, 1851, 455.

5 Love 90.

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Sir William then left for Detroit, but Occom and Fowler stayed on among the Oneidas for two months, living in a wigwam constructed for them without “axes or hammers” from “the Remains of the Oakes & chestnuts fell many years ago by the violence of wind.”<sup>6</sup> Occom preached a number of times and was respectfully attended to, but by September he felt obliged to return to Connecticut because promised support from New England missionary sources was canceled. This abandonment by his missionary backers, combined with positive responses from both the Oneidas and Sir William, were experiences that would shape Occom’s decision twelve years later to accept Sir William’s offer to help negotiate resettlement of Occom’s community in the Oneida Country.

When he returned to Connecticut in September, 1761, Occom brought back with him a young Oneida, and during the winter he and David Fowler learned the youth’s language as the Oneida youth learned English. Occom again visited the Oneida Country in the summer of 1762, and continued to solicit support in New England for a regular position as a missionary to the Oneidas. Notwithstanding Occom’s hard work in preparing the Oneidas to receive a minister, and in studying their language, the paid position at Oneida that was created in 1766 was awarded to a white protégé of Eleazer Wheelock, Samuel Kirkland, who at age twenty-six was seventeen years younger than Occom. Occom’s brothers-in-law David and Jacob Fowler were however employed as low-paid teachers at Oneida, to serve under Kirkland.

### **Occom and the Mohegans, 1766-1773.**

By 1766, Occom was thoroughly trained and proven---and seemingly unemployable in

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6 Love 92.

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any position to which his qualifications entitled him. Like other pioneers, Occom had discovered that a first-rate education did not automatically lead to acceptance into the establishment that had trained him. He could go on serving as a teacher of tribal children and preaching among his own desperately poor people, but this generated so little money that Occom had to supplement his income carving wooden utensils.

Occom continued pressing his case for more appropriate support. The clerical establishment's solution was to send Occom abroad to raise money for North American missions. Between 1766 and 1768, Occom delivered more than four hundred addresses throughout England and Scotland, was received by King George III and the Archbishop of Canterbury and raised far more money than expected, including two hundred pounds from the King himself. In all, Occom is believed to have raised nearly ten thousand pounds.<sup>7</sup> Now an accomplished public speaker in English, Occom turned his fund-raising tour into an enormous success.

His return to Connecticut was a disaster. Wheelock had promised that Occom's family would be well cared for in his absence, but Wheelock failed them. Not long after discovering his family impoverished and neglected, Occom also learned that Wheelock planned to use the resources Occom had raised in Britain for the education of white youths at (what became) Dartmouth College. Wheelock's rationale was that some of Dartmouth's white students might become missionaries to tribes. Occom expressed dismay that "the Indian was converted into an English School and that the English had crowded out the Indian youth." This, he felt, would "disgust" many in England and Scotland who had answered his appeals for funds. With entire

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accuracy, Occom wrote Wheelock,

In my apprehension your present plan is not calculated to benefit the poor Indians, it is no ways winning to them and unless there is an alternative suitable to the minds of the Indians you will never do much more good among the Indians: your First Plan was much better than the last, you did much good in it and if you rightly managed the Indians your Institution would have flourished by this Time.

Memorably, Occom informed Wheelock, “ instead of your institution Becoming *Alma Mater* to my brethren, she will be too *Alba Mater* to nourish the tawnies.” Years later, after Wheelock’s death, Occom repeated his censure that Dartmouth College had “done little or no good to the Indians with all that money we collected in England.” Revered today as the founder and first President of Dartmouth College, Wheelock is also reviled for his treatment of the man he termed “My black Son Mr. Occom.”<sup>8</sup>

In recent years, Wheelock and his protégé Samuel Kirkland, founder of Hamilton College, have both been denounced as greedy hypocrites. Occom himself seems to have understood that Wheelock and Kirkland were not incarnations of evil but rather flawed human beings whose views, though prejudiced and obtuse, were actually far more benign than those of most others in white society at this time. Even after having been repeatedly dealt with by Wheelock and Kirkland in ways that today seem inexcusable, and which caused Occom enormous suffering, Occom never broke entirely with them and indeed tried as best he could to enlighten them about how to serve tribes more effectively.

Depressed by the shabby sequel to his British triumph, Occom resorted briefly to drink.

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7 De Forest 455.

8 Love 158-60, 92.

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But realizing how much his community needed him, and that his abilities did not depend on validation by the New England establishment, a newly resolute Occom vowed to render his community self-sufficient. His first idea was for the Mohegans to seize control of their own lands, by freeing them from Connecticut's manipulative control, exercised in alliance with an incompetent sachem.

The continued survival of an hereditary Mohegan sachemate was a consequence of the peculiar circumstances in which Connecticut had been founded in the 1630s as an insurgent, self-created polity lacking a royal charter. As part of their attempt to acquire legitimacy in the eyes of tribes as well as the Dutch colony to their west, Connecticut colonists forged an alliance of mutual convenience with the Mohegan sachem Uncas, and claimed to have bought Connecticut from him. Uncas's own land claims were problematic, since he had risen from modest local origins by allying himself with the English against the Pequots, the overlords of most of Connecticut prior to their decimation in 1637.

Need to borrow legitimacy from Uncas was obviated in 1662, when Connecticut secured a royal charter from the newly restored English monarch Charles II. The Mohegan sachemate nonetheless survived, and continued to issue deeds purporting to convey aboriginal land in Connecticut. The resulting "Mohegan Case" dragged on from 1704 until 1773, when it was finally dismissed by the Royal Privy Council in London.

For much of this time, from 1723 to 1769, rival descendants of Uncas competed for the sachemate, with Connecticut supporting the claims of Ben Uncas I, II and III. Mohegans

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opposed to this line claimed Ben Uncas I had been an illegitimate “half-dog.”<sup>9</sup> These latter-day sachems functioned essentially as selfish landlords, leasing out the Mohegans’ Connecticut-guaranteed “Sequestered Lands” to white colonists and collecting rent. Critics complained that this left ordinary Mohegans with neither land to till nor a share of the rent.

Seeking the support of his new friend Sir William Johnson against Connecticut authorities and their puppet sachem Ben Uncas III, Samson Occom wrote Sir William that

We think we are imposed upon by our overseers and What our overseers have done we take to be done by the Assembly---by what they have already done We think they Want [to] render us as Cyphers in our own land. They want [to] root us out of our land root & Branch, they have already Proceeded with arbitrary Power over us, and We Want to know from Whence they got that Power or Whither they Can Maintain Such Power Justly over us. They have indeed us’d Ben Uncas as a Tool in their Hands and Ben Uncas was to do nothing With out his Council While he was our Sachem and he has now Cast of[f] his Council....the English intends to Continue him as a Sachem [over] us, but We have a Law and a Custom to make a Sachem over us Without the help of any People or Nation in the World, and When he makes himself unworthy of his Station we put him down ourselves.<sup>10</sup>

Occom was even willing to consider abolition of the sachemate. Arguing from Biblical example, Occom maintained that “the children of Israel did as well without a king as with one.”<sup>11</sup>

The death of Ben Uncas III in May of 1769 provoked an open confrontation between Connecticut officialdom and Mohegans led by Occom. At the funeral, Occom and the other pallbearers dropped the sachem’s coffin “on the ground in front of the gathered dignitaries from the Connecticut government.” One of these dignitaries expressed surprise that the Mohegan rebels “Seem Ungratefully to Consider, all the past Acts of Kindness, Protection and Care, of the Government, as Meer Acts of Power and Authority, Exercised for the purpose of Depriving

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9 Joseph Johnson, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren, The Writings of Joseph Johnson, 1751-1776*, ed. Laura J. Murray, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998, 38.

10 Joseph Johnson 37. Date uncertain.

them, of their Freedom, and Estates.”<sup>12</sup>

Occom would soon regret his foray into partisan Mohegan politics. Following the Royal Privy Council’s 1773 dismissal of the case against Connecticut, Occom commented resignedly,

The grand controversy which has subsisted between the Colony of Connecticut and the Mohegan Indians above seventy years, is finally decided in favor of the Colony. I am afraid the poor Indians will never stand a good chance with the English in their land controversies, because they are very poor, they have no money. Money is almighty now-a-days, and the Indians have no learning, no wit, no cunning: the English have all.<sup>13</sup>

The role he could best play, he concluded, was that of a teacher and moral leader for all the tribal groups of southern New England, defining goals rather than fighting over spoils within his particular tribe.

### **Planning for Emigration from New England, 1773-1775.**

Occom next turned to formulating the project that would dominate the final years of his life, the founding of Brothertown. In the same year that the Privy Council dismissed the Mohegan suit, Occom presided over a meeting at Mohegan to which delegates from six other southern New England tribal communities were invited. A “vast Number” attended, and on March 13, 1773, they resolved to “seek a Place somewhere, for us seven towns to settle down together in Peace.”<sup>14</sup>

The fact that such an intertribal meeting could be successfully convened reflected the newly emergent sense of fellow feeling that had been developing steadily among the tribal

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11 Joseph Johnson 38.

12 Joseph Johnson 38.

13 Love 123.

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communities of southern New England since the Great Awakening of 1740. Even before 1740, shifts from one tribal settlement to another had been frequent, as individuals sought marriage partners and changed tribal allegiances. But after 1740, interaction amongst these settlements became increasingly purposeful. Occom had toured them all to hold prayer meetings, and in each settlement an observant Christian cohort formed that identified with like-minded individuals in other settlements, and deplored old tribal rivalries such as that between the Pequots and the Mohegans, dating from Uncas's 1630s revolt.

Awareness of a common plight transcended colonial as well as tribal boundaries. The Narragansetts in Rhode Island had been experiencing problems with their Rhode Island-backed sachem similar to those alienating ordinary Mohegans from their Connecticut-backed sachem. The logical next step was for scattered but like-minded Christian tribal subgroups to band together and seek a new life freed from meddlesome colonial officials and constricting tribal traditions.

The southern New England tribal settlements within which Occom was seeking converts numbered around two thousand. A 1774 Connecticut census listed 1363 "Indians" including 246 at Mohegan, 186 at Groton, 237 at Stonington as well as various smaller groups, such as the 43 at Farmington.<sup>15</sup> Across the Connecticut border in Rhode Island and Long Island lived hundreds more. Most of these tribal settlements dated back a century or more, and included individuals hostile or indifferent to Occom's message. Combining observant Christians from all these scattered settlements into one compact, mutually supportive community therefore seemed

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14 Joseph Johnson 207.

15 De Forest 373, 439, 474.

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desirable from both spiritual and material points of view.

Though the name “Brothertown” was not adopted until 1785, present in Occom’s thinking from the outset in 1773 was the concept of a *town* composed of related and like-minded *brothers*. Occom envisioned a largely self-governing New England-style town limited to persons of similar backgrounds, and with strong bonds of attachment to each other. The New England town model of governance readily suggested itself to a person who identified so thoroughly with New England Puritanism, and for whom tribal modes of governance had become discredited. Though the New England Puritans he knew personally had all failed to live up to their own professed ideals, this did not deter Occom, who had himself studied the original texts from which the Puritans drew inspiration. Occom’s most immediate models were the “Praying Towns” of Massachusetts. While far from perfect, “Praying Towns” such as Mashpee on Cape Cod and Gay Head on Martha’s Vineyard had more autonomy and better-protected land rights in Occom’s day than any tribal group in Connecticut, Rhode Island or Long Island.<sup>16</sup>

A self-sufficient agricultural town composed entirely of tribal Christians governing themselves on a New England model would be free of parasitic sachems and meddling whites. Not reliant on white missionary support, this town would be free to choose their own ministers and teachers. Eleazer Wheelock understood this point clearly. “They design,” noted Wheelock in 1775,

to settle in a Body, as a civilized and Christian People, and cultivate those Lands for their Subsistence: and also by them, as soon as they shall be able, to support all Divine Ordinances and Schools among them: and invite their Savage Brethren to an imitation of them, and a Participation of all these Benefits and Privileges with them. They purpose to

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<sup>16</sup> See Francis G. Hutchins, *Mashpee, The Story of Cape Cod’s Indian Town*, West Franklin: Amarta, 1979.

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have, as far as may be, of their own Sons for Ministers and School-Masters.<sup>17</sup>

Notwithstanding their myopic treatment by white New Englanders, Occom and others associated with him in the founding of Brothertown aspired to live according to the New Englanders' *principles*. Well aware of the *prejudices* of white New Englanders, Occom was convinced that he could not depend on their good will or sense of fairness, and that his people must set forth on their own to found their own New England-style community, based on New England principles but at a distance from any and all white New Englanders. Occom said in effect, *We want your religion and your laws, we just don't want you.*

This carefully thought-out perspective, combining conversion and self-reliance, is reflected in a 1774 letter to Connecticut Governor Trumbull written by several of Occom's Farmington followers:

Most of us have...in some measure become acquainted with, and formed some General Ideas of the English Custom and Manners....And we being desirous...to be acquainted with the Statute Laws of this Colony, which appears to us highly Necessary, since our English Fathers inform us that we are Considered by them as being Subject to the Laws and Civil regulations of this Colony...We your Honors Humble Supplicants do therefore pray your Honors to give us a Colony Law Book, to Guide and Direct us in our Conduct.<sup>18</sup>

Articulating similar sentiments in a more personal style, Occom's future son-in-law Joseph Johnson informed Governor Trumbull in the summer of 1773 that he was

of a Nation little respected in these days, and for good reason. My forefathers, the Natives of this land, brought this disrespect upon themselves and theirs. When your forefathers intreated them as brothers, and received them into their friendship, and in a brotherly manner declared unto them the mind and will of God, they paid no regard to your Worthy Ancestors, nor to their words, but walked, every one according to the Imagination of their own wicked and unchristianized hearts; and lived in Intemperance,

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17 Love 224-25.

18 Joseph Johnson 231.

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Excess, rioting, and other desolute Practices, those and many others that might be mentioned. Their unfaithfulness, Ingratitude, and unhumane Conduct justly brought this disesteem upon them, and also in these days many are walking in the same beaten track of their fore fathers, the Savages, which Confirms Disrepect, and Disesteem upon the Indian Nation and hence arises Contempt. If an Indian appears in publick he is looked upon with Disdain, and in the hearts of the Spectators is despised, which Causes those of us who have Sincerely Separated ourselves from the Croud and from the Sinfull Practices of our fore fathers to mourn, and be also despised, in the eyes of the Polite world.<sup>19</sup>

Unsparring in his denunciation of his tribal ancestors as well as tribal contemporaries who persisted in “wicked” ways, Joseph Johnson was no less critical of the unwillingness of white Connecticut colonists even to try to distinguish between traditionalist “Savages” and pious Christian converts. Under the circumstances, what could those do who had “Sincerely Separated” themselves “from the Sinfull Practices of our fore fathers” other than leave Connecticut and begin a new life somewhere else?

Born in 1751, Joseph Johnson was an orphan who as a young adult attached himself to Occom, and resolved to follow in his mentor’s footsteps as best he could. His marriage to Occom’s daughter Tabitha Occom on December 2, 1773, sealed his status as a full-fledged protégé of and assistant to Occom. Johnson secured ordination as a minister on August 25, 1774, and served effectively as Occom’s deputy in negotiations directed toward establishment of what would become Brothertown.

### **Sir William Johnson and the Oneida Negotiations, 1773-1774.**

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19 Joseph Johnson 185.

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At the planning session held at Mohegan on March 13, 1773, several possible regions for the proposed new settlement were considered, including Ohio. But in September of 1773, Sir William Johnson happened to be traveling through New England and, as Joseph Johnson related, “Nine of our Country men went to see Sir William from different Towns” on Fishers Island, near the eastern tip of Long Island, “and to our joy He received us gladly, and shewed us great respects.”<sup>20</sup> When Sir William suggested that land might be made available in the Oneida Country, the New Englanders expressed a desire to proceed there immediately. Sir William advised against this, saying that he thought it best if he first broached the matter to the Oneidas.

In early October, soon after his return to Johnson Hall, Sir William sent a message to the Oneidas through “Saghaugarat one of their chiefs” inquiring whether the Oneidas would be willing to allocate a tract about ten miles square to “New England Indians.” The Oneidas convened “a full Council of all their People, and Warriors etc.” at which they “agreed to what Sir William had proposed.” Five Oneidas then traveled to Johnson Hall to report this decision to Sir William, and on October 15, 1773, “begged that he would tell...the New England Indians” that the Oneidas

would be glad to see them in their Nation on their Return from Hunting, when they would shew them a Place to settle on, which if they did not like, they would give them liberty to chuse a Place that might be more agreeable. They then concluded telling Sir William that the Chiefs, and Warriors begged his Advice in the Affairs.<sup>21</sup>

The Oneidas had offered one hundred square miles of their land to unspecified numbers of vaguely described “New England Indians” sight unseen, simply because Sir William Johnson

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Johnson 208.

<sup>21</sup> Sir William Johnson, *Papers*, Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1957, 12:1037.

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had sent a message requesting this. By implication however, the Oneidas retained some liberty to revise or rescind this offer if problems should arise. The “Chiefs, and Warriors” who traveled to Johnson Hall to “beg...his Advice” undoubtedly also posed questions to him. In the complex relationship that had been built up over the years between Sir William and the Iroquois “Six Nations” Confederacy, deference in full tribal Council to Sir William’s desires was compatible with lots of subtle resistance.

Prior to 1763, Sir William had been compelled to work hard to establish his influence among the Oneidas and the other five members of the “Six Nations” Confederacy, as he sought to make these independent tribal nations useful tools in Britain’s imperial struggles against the French. But once the French were ousted from North America, Sir William had ceased to be simply a behind-the-scenes power trying to put pressure on the “Six Nations.” After 1763, Sir William functioned as a virtual monarch almost literally embodying King George III’s royal authority throughout interior North America north of the Ohio.

As a “Mohawk Baronet,”<sup>22</sup> Sir William not only held dear the interests of his Mohawk relatives and their “Six Nations” allies but also possessed the values of a newly minted member of the eighteenth century British aristocracy. Anglican, Baronet, Major General and royal administrator, Sir William looked forward to a British landlord-dominated future for the North American interior. Sir William liked the tribes’ traditional ways of life, and wanted to preserve “Six Nations” control of the interior for at least a few more decades. He expected tribal hunting would then be replaced by a more settled, hierarchical agrarian society, into the lower echelons of which members of tribes would be merged. He hoped his tribal friends would turn voluntarily

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to agriculture and abandon hunting as a result of reasoned choice. This, he knew, would take time because the current attitude of his Iroquois friends was that it had “been ordained from the beginning that the White People should Cultivate the Arts, and themselves pursue hunting, that no other Way of Life is agreeable to them, or consistent with their Maxims of policy and the frame of their Constitution.” For the present, he therefore thought it best to preserve tribal institutions, which were at least preferable to the extension westward of what he termed disparagingly the “Dissenting” culture of New England. Sir William sought to sustain Iroquois traditions as a delaying tactic until British landlords materialized in sufficient numbers to become the shapers of the North American interior.

Sir William admired the great success of the seventeenth century French Jesuit strategy of converting tribes to Christianity without insisting on major changes in tribal ways of life. “The Indians of Canada,” he remarked,

were made Christian but not Civilized according to our general Acceptance of the Word, Yet they were as orderly a people as any of our Lower Class are. The French Considered Hunting as their Trade, in w[hi]ch they were More usefull to the Community and happier in themselves than they co[ul]d have been in any other profession. To this their Genius Led them and in this they Excelled, and When in due time from the failure of Game, or from their becoming more reconciled to our Arts, they sho[ul]d Incline to alter their profession, They must meet with Ample employment in such a Country as America.<sup>23</sup>

Sir William had himself promoted an Anglican counterpart of the French Jesuit strategy of seeking tribal conversion without insisting on great changes in tribal ways of life, but had concluded that “our Clergy, are all Men of regular Education, bred in the Land of Luxury” and therefore indisposed to “make many sacrifices” in the Jesuit manner by coming to reside among

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22 See James Thomas Flexner, *Mohawk Baronet*, New York, 1959.

23 Sir William Johnson Papers 7:599-600.

tribes that supported themselves through hunting.<sup>24</sup>

Sir William disliked the New England Puritan approach to tribal conversion almost as much as he admired the French Jesuit approach. In Sir William's caustic opinion, the characteristic seventeenth century New England Puritan approach to tribes had been to declare war, seize tribal lands and individuals and forcibly "reduce" members of tribes to civility, often enslaving them to this end. "The N[ew] Englanders with all their Zeal and piety," contended Sir William, were "intent on Extirpating the Indians to make room for themselves and wanted More to plant themselves than Religion in the Country." Scornfully, Sir William noted that New England colonists were commonly

represented as a people who came here on acc[oun]t of their principles, than w[hi]ch nothing can be more false except as to a Very few....The passion for Adventuring, a prospect of Gain, Want of property, Inconstancy of Disposition and some other Circumstances that need not to be ment[i]one[d] brought together the Majority.

In consequence, comparatively little effort had been devoted to educating and converting members of tribes. After a century of overwhelmingly hostile contact with New England colonists, surviving members of New England tribes became

so Surrounded by our settlements...that they Naturally and almost Imperceptibly fell into our Manners, Customs and Religion. Tho' I should observe that Notwithstanding the Length of time they have had for improvement and many other Circumstances which as it were Detach them from an Indian Life They have Made such slow advances in everything but Vice and Idleness that I should Sooner Trust 20 Ottawas in a Room with my plate, than one of them. The Generality Indeed of those who are educated in their principles do (like their Teachers) carry a great deal of holiness in their Countenances and Exterior deportment *when Sober*; and derive this one Advantage from the little religion they possess that it serves as a pretext for begging or indeed for any thing that may enable them to Exist without much Labour, and the present wretched State of most of these people does not a little contribute to deterr the rest from entering upon what they fear may produce the same Effects amongst themselves.

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24 Sir William Johnson Papers 7:602.

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Unlike French Jesuits, New England Puritans had insisted on a drastic alteration in a tribe member's traditional way of life as a precondition to acceptance as a "real" Christian. Education in English, acceptance of English jurisdiction and law and ability to hold a job within English society were thought indispensable. Becoming a Christian was considered the culmination of a process involving acceptance of English ways of life and integration into the English economic system, usually of course at its lowest level as apprentices or agricultural laborers. Tribes such as those in New England that had been thus reduced to civility seemed to the Iroquois to have "derived no advantages from it, that on the Contrary they are poor, abject, full of Avarice [and] Hypocrisy." Of these views, Sir William confessed himself "sorry to say that they are in General too well founded."<sup>25</sup>

In 1762, seven years before establishing Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, Eleazer Wheelock had proposed to Sir William founding a school in tribal territory, to be accompanied by "the settlement of three or four Towns round about it, I would remove with it and bring several Ministers with me of the best character and take care to people the place with Inhabitants of known honesty, Integrity and such as love Indians and will seek their Interest."<sup>26</sup> All too aware that this would become an opening wedge for innumerable white "Dissenters," Sir William had firmly declined Wheelock's offer.

Surveying the merits and drawbacks of the French Jesuit approach on the one hand and the New England "Dissenting" approach on the other, Sir William proposed as preferable a third

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25 Sir William Johnson Papers 7:597-602

26 Love 157.

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middle course. This was in a sense a variant of the “Dissenting” approach but far gentler and more gradual. He suggested that tribes be allowed to gain familiarity with “civilized” society while retaining their independence, so that they could themselves become voluntarily persuaded of the superiority of the life of agriculturalists to the “savage” life of hunters. While Sir William had no desire to see the Iroquois suffer the fate that had befallen New England tribes, he was convinced that a transformation of Iroquois hunters into English-style agricultural laborers “must one day take place.” When it did, he insisted firmly, “the Motion must flow from themselves, and...they must fall into it when our increas’d Numbers place them more in our Neighbourhood, and...they discover Superior Advantages in our Way of Living than in their own, which as yet they do not.”<sup>27</sup> The only sensible course in such circumstances was to prepare the Iroquois by cautious diplomacy, and to place in their view positive examples of a settled way of life.

These sentiments expressed in 1770 presumably lay behind Sir William’s 1773 decision to respond favorably to Occom’s project. Unlike Wheelock’s 1762 proposal, Occom’s seemed one that might actually prove beneficial to the Oneidas and their “Six Nations” allies. Won over by the persistence, ability and candor of Samson Occom and his dedicated associates, the usually skeptical Sir William set aside his disdain for most New England tribal converts. The Occom team working effectively together apparently convinced Sir William that they came within his restricted category of “the best Qualified Ind[ian]s on whom regards sh[oul]d be bestowed.”<sup>28</sup>

In October, 1773, after securing the Oneidas’ acquiescence in principle to the proposed New England settlement, and their willingness to meet in Oneida Country during the winter with

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27 Sir William Johnson Papers 7:599.

28 Sir William Johnson Papers 7:600.

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New England representatives, Sir William conveyed word of this to leaders of the planned emigration. Delighted, Joseph Johnson and Elijah Wimpey immediately traveled to Johnson Hall to hear details and confer with Sir William.

Joseph Johnson then personally brought word of this opportunity to the six tribal settlements in Connecticut and Rhode Island and “at every town I called the People together both small, and great, male, and female, and they received the good news with great joy. I did not go to the seventh town [on Long Island], by reason of the inconveniency of going by water.” Despite all this traveling, Joseph Johnson also found time to marry Tabitha Occom on December 2, 1773, at Norwich, Connecticut.<sup>29</sup>

A month after this, on January 6, 1774, Samson Occom in a letter to Eleazer Wheelock proudly reported that his brother-in-law Jacob Fowler and his son-in-law Joseph Johnson “begin to preach, and they are well receivd, both by the White people and Indians. If they Shall live Some Time in the World and grow in grace, they will make great Preachers.” Occom also advised Wheelock that

Several, from the Tribes round about here, have join'd to Seek for a New Country amongst our Western Brethren; and Joseph Johnson and Elijah Wympey of Farmington, were up at Sir William Johnson's upon the Business, last November and they brought down good News; The Onoydas Chearfully Promise to give us freely, if we will Settle amongst them, Ten Miles Square of Land, and We shall Chuse the Spot ourselves and Sir William and Mr. Kirkland Say, we can get 15 or 20 Square, as easy as Ten if We need it.

Regarding the next step, Occom noted that,

Four Indians are Just sot out again for Onyda to have further Conference with the Indians; Joseph Johnson is gone for Mohegan, Jacob Fowler for Groton & Montauk, Samuel Tobias for Naroganset and Elijah Wympey for Farmington, And if the Lord will Continue my Health I purpose to go up in the Spring. I hope the Lord is about opening a Door for the gospel among the Western Tribes of Indians by their Eastern Brethren....Jo.

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<sup>29</sup> Joseph Johnson 208-09, 205.

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Johnson intends to move up there as soon as possible if nobody else goes...and if a goodly Number will go up [I] Shall have Inclination to go with them to begin a good work with them and to lay my Bones there. (Sir William is Heartily engag'd in the affair. We Waited upon his Honor in the beginning of the Fall, while he was at Fisher Island, and he promis'd us his assistance, all in his power, and he has already taken much with the Indians to help us).<sup>30</sup>

Though he was guiding the planned move closely, and appeared personally at key meetings, Occom was letting his new son-in-law and other relatives do much of the traveling and negotiating.

Of the four New England representatives who set out for the Oneida Country, two turned back. But Joseph Johnson reached Johnson Hall on January 13, 1774. Sir William carefully instructed him on how he should conduct himself in the upcoming negotiations, and “sent a Belt of Wampum” to the Oneidas and others of the “Six Nations” requesting that they “make no Opposition to their Settlement, nor entertain any Jealousy on that account.”<sup>31</sup>

Bearing Sir William’s “Belt of Wampum” as well as a “Silver Pipe” and tobacco supplied by Sir William, Joseph Johnson proceeded on to Kanoarohare where on January 20 he outlined his hopes to the assembled Oneidas. In line with Sir William’s instructions, Joseph Johnson addressed the Oneidas as “an elder Brother” and described the group he represented as “a younger Brother.” One incentive for the later choice of the name “Brothertown” must have been its positive resonance in terms of this “Six Nations” diplomatic tradition. Claiming to be “acting for all our Brethren in New England, or at least for seven Towns,” Joseph Johnson explained that his community were the descendants of “poor, Ignorant, and blind Indians” who had been abused by English colonists who had cheated them out of most of their land:

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30 Joseph Johnson 205.

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the English striped them, yea they as it were cut off their Right hands...and thus our English Brethren leaves us, and laugh. So now Brethren, we leave the English those who have acted unjustly towards us in New England, I say we leave them all in the hands of that God who knoweth all things, and will reward every one according to their deeds whether good or Evil.<sup>32</sup>

Joseph Johnson also emphasized that residents of all the “seven Towns” he represented had shown great interest in moving to Oneida Country, even though only two representatives had persevered through deep January snow to confer with them.

On January 22, the Oneidas formally replied, expressing sympathy for the “low Circumstances” of the New England tribes. Referring to Joseph Johnson’s claim that “Sir William was pleased with the design, and advised you in the affair, and gave you Encouragement,” the Oneidas assured him that

Sir William also acquainted us of your Desires, or Intentions of removing to this part of the Country, and as soon as we was enformed of your Circumstances, we took the Message that Sir William Johnson sent to us, on your behalf, under our Considerations, and Brethren we were all glad.

The Oneidas then formally acceded to the proposal, and explained that the New England emigrants were to regard the Tuscaroras as “your Elder Brothers because they came here before you, and because they came from a greater distance.” The Oneidas themselves were to be considered elder brothers of *both* the Tuscaroras and the New England emigrants, whereas the Mohawks, Onondagas and Senecas were to be looked upon as “your fathers.”<sup>33</sup>

On January 24, Joseph Johnson thanked the Oneidas for accepting them as younger brothers, and also asked if they would be willing to allot them somewhat more land than the ten

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31 Joseph Johnson 206.

32 Joseph Johnson 207.

33 Joseph Johnson 218-19.

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mile square tract currently under discussion. In reply the same day, the Oneidas assured Joseph Johnson that “we shall not confine you, or pen you up, to Ten Miles square: We have much Land at our disposal, and you need not fear but that you shall have Land sufficient for you, and for your Children after you.”<sup>34</sup> On this satisfactory note, discussions were concluded. Returning home by way of Johnson Hall, Joseph Johnson reported what had transpired to Sir William.

No specific tract had as yet been designated. Little could have been ascertained about the agricultural potential of snow-covered lands. What had been accomplished in this January conference was a formal adoption ceremony which presupposed that the New England emigrants, wherever they ended up living, would become subordinate members of the Oneida polity and of the larger “Six Nations” Confederacy. The New England emigrants were to be the youngest tribal brother, and as such circumscribed by the Oneidas’ traditional political and social structures. The Oneidas had been asked by Sir William to do a favor, and had agreed. Beyond that, they evidently thought of themselves as little affected, and assumed they would always exercise full discretionary authority over both the “New England Indians” and the land allotted them.

The New England emigrants saw their prospective situation quite differently. In a letter to potential New York donors for example, Joseph Johnson described the planned emigration as having two objectives. One was to help

my poor sinking, decaying Brethren the Indians that are scattered up and down amongst the English Inhabitants in particular in the New England Governments...I have endeavoured to get them unitedly willing to go westward, and there to Settle together in peace and be under proper Regulations...[on] a Large Tract of good Land.

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34 Joseph Johnson 220-22.

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Secondly, Joseph Johnson stressed “not only the hopes...of seeing my now poor Brethren in a prosperous way, but...the hope of our leading our Western Brethren, by our example in the ways of industry, in the ways of husbandry, in the way of Civility, and above all in the ways of godliness.”<sup>35</sup> The New England emigrants not only expected to live quite differently from the way the Oneidas currently lived, they planned to “lead” the Oneidas and not to be led by them. From the New Englanders’ perspective, being adopted as the Oneidas’ youngest brother was just a formality Sir William had insisted they must go through in order to acquire land in the Oneida Country. The Oneidas on the other hand understood the adoption ceremony to be of binding political and legal significance. Skillful at conveying the impression that conflicts would be resolved in due course, Sir William seems to have assured both parties that their expectations were justified.

### **The October 4, 1774 Agreement.**

In the summer of 1774, Samson Occom and his brother-in-law David Fowler visited the Oneida Country to inspect the land to be allotted. They were startled to learn that the irreplaceable Sir William had died suddenly in the midst of a tribal conference on July 11, shortly before they arrived at Johnson Hall. Determined to press forward, they managed to reach agreement with the Oneidas on a suitable tract, the bounds of which were then set down in a formal document attested to by Colonel Guy Johnson, Sir William’s nephew, son-in-law and successor. This agreement, dated October 4, 1774, read:

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35 Joseph Johnson 275-76, letter dated August 26, 1775.

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By Guy Johnson Esq. Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Northern Department of North America etc. etc.

Whereas, The Indians of Mohegan Naraganset Montock, Pequods of Groton and of Stonington, Nahantick, Farmington, Inhabiting within the New England Governments, Did Last Year represent that they Were Very much Streightened and Reduced to Such small Pittance of land that they could no longer remain there and Did through the Channell of Sir William Johnson Bart, late Superintendent Apply to the Six Nations for some lands to Live on Which was at Length agreed to in my Presence at the last Treaty and a Tract allotted them by the Oneidas, And Whereas Some of them have since in Company with the Oneida Chiefs view'd the said lands and Determined on its Boundary as followes desireing a Certificate of the Same and that it might be Entered on the Records of Indian Affairs, Viz., Beginning at the West End of the Scaniadaris, or the long Lake which is at the Head of One of the Branches of the Orisca Creek and from thence about twelve Miles Northerly or so far that an Easterly Course from a Certain point on the first Mentioned Course Shall Intersect the Road or path leading from Old Oneida to the German Flats Where the said Path Crosses Scanindowa Creek Running into the Oneida Lake. Then the Same Course Continued to the Line Settled as the Limits between the Province of New York and the Indians at the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768, thence Southerly along the said Line about thirteen Miles or so far as that a Westerly Line from thence keeping one Mile South of the Most Southerly Bend of Orisca Creek Shall Reach the Place of Beginning so as to Comprehend the Lake first Mentioned---I Do therefore in Compliance With the Joint Request of the said Oneidas and New England Indians Declare that the Said Oneidas Do Grant to the said New England Indians and there Posterity for Ever Without Power of Alienation to any Subject the Afore Described Tract with its Appurtenances in the Amplest Manner. Also full Liberty of Hunting all sorts of Game throughout the Whole Country of the Oneidas, Beaver Hunting only Excepted. With this Particular Clause or Reservation that the same shall not be Possessed by any Persons Deemed of the said Tribes Who are Descended from or have Intermixed with Negroes and Mulattoes.

Given under my Hand and Seal at Arms at Guy Park, October the 4<sup>th</sup>, 1774.<sup>36</sup>

The most basic question posed by the October 4, 1774, agreement was what authority could or would enforce it upon the Oneidas if they backed out. That this written document was even felt necessary by Occom and his associates points to a large fact: Sir William could no longer personally propel this vulnerable project forward.

The agreement also posed numerous other questions, perhaps most troubling of which is

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36 Text from Love 222-23.

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whose idea it was to exclude “Persons Deemed of the said Tribes Who are Descended from or have Intermixed with Negroes and Mulattoes.” The Oneidas, Colonel Guy Johnson or representatives of “the New England Indians” could conceivably have proposed this limitation, to which all presumably at least assented.

Occom identified with African Americans as a mistreated group, and censured Eleazer Wheelock’s ownership of Ishmael, an African American slave. For “Preachers or ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” to own slaves, Occom observed (without mentioning any names), was

inconsistent with their character and function. If I understand the Gospel aright, I think it is a Dispensation of Freedom and Liberty, both Temporal and Spiritual, and [if] the Preachers of the Holy Gospel of Jesus do preach it according to the mind of God, they Preach True Liberty and how can such keep Negroes in Slavery? And if Ministers are True Liberty men, let them preach Liberty for the poor Negroes fervently and with great zeal, and those Ministers who have Negroes set an Example before their People by freeing their Negroes, let them show their Faith by their Works.<sup>37</sup>

Occom nonetheless worried about sharing his own community’s limited resources. He had also witnessed divisive controversies at Mohegan about whether or not African Americans should be allowed use of the “Sequestered Lands” and may have wanted to avert similar problems in the Oneida Country. But barring all children and spouses of “Negroes and Mulattoes” seems unlikely to have been desired by Occom, who presumably would have preferred a criterion for exclusion based on Christian faith. The Oneidas on the other hand may have been determined to exclude from their lands persons supposed less likely to favor continuing the Oneidas’ traditional way of life focused on “full Liberty of Hunting.” Aware that any agricultural use of what the British considered to be royal hunting grounds was controversial, Colonel Guy Johnson may also

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37 Love 176.

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have been anxious to limit potential problems resulting from his predecessor's patronage of this unorthodox project.

Whatever its source and purpose, advance exclusion of an entire category of persons underscored the fact that the "New England Indians" were not as yet a functioning entity. For this reason among others, the Oneidas no doubt considered their gift of land tentative. The Oneidas had met with only four representatives---Samson Occom, Occom's son-in-law and brother-in-law and one other "New England Indian"---and had in effect promised to make land available to them and other "New England Indians" if and when individuals showed up who were capable of functioning as a younger brother.

Insofar as this agreement can be considered a binding commitment by the Oneidas, it could cover only rights that the Oneidas then possessed. In recording the agreement in British official records, Colonel Guy Johnson was careful to insure that its wording was compatible with the official British definition of the land rights the Oneidas (and therefore any tribe holding under the Oneidas) could enjoy. From the British perspective, all that the Oneidas possessed was the right to use hunting grounds owned by King George III. In theory, the King could at any time exercise his Divine-right "pleasure" and arbitrarily expel the Oneidas (and anyone holding rights under the Oneidas) and then freely grant their ancestral lands to anyone the King might choose to favor.

This understanding is reflected in the agreement's stipulation that the "New England Indians" could "Live on" this royally-owned tract "for Ever" (in other words, until the monarch had a change of heart) but would be "Without Power of Alienation to any Subject." Joseph Johnson had told the Oneidas on January 20, 1774, that the New England emigrants would have

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much preferred to “purchase” land.<sup>38</sup> But realizing that this would have required renegotiating the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, and that the Oneidas would probably not have agreed to renegotiate it, Sir William had persuaded the New England emigrants to accept instead tribal adoption by the Oneidas, even though this meant that they would have even less security in their land rights than the Oneidas themselves. Joseph Johnson had indicated his awareness of this when he described the proposed settlement to potential New York donors in 1775 as “bordering on your frontiers” or in other words just over the Line of Property established by the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix between the area where New York exercised jurisdiction and the King’s tribally occupied hunting grounds.<sup>39</sup>

Since the New England emigrants had virtually no money, apart from what little they might be able to raise by charitable donation and/or sale of their New England lands, they could see obvious advantages in the fact that the Oneidas had found it “in your hearts to give us land.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, not having to sell their New England lands meant that they could always retreat there if the resettlement experiment failed.

For their part, the Oneidas thought of themselves as “Absolute Proprietors” of their ancestral lands---as they had indeed been described in the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix---and refused to concede that King George III could evict them at will. Well aware of this, Sir William had been maneuvering for years to head off friction between London officials and his “Six Nations” friends by pretending that their differing perspectives could in time be reconciled.

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38 Joseph Johnson 209.

39 Joseph Johnson 275-76.

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While he lived, Sir William preserved remarkable credibility with all parties. The distance between *Whitehall and the Wilderness* (to borrow the evocative title of a book by Jack M. Sosin) did much to make possible the success of Sir William's juggling act. But even Sir William might have had difficulty coping with the animosities and distrust generated by the Revolution that erupted less than a year after his death.

### Revolution Disrupts Plans to Emigrate from New England.

The Oneidas expected that a number of emigrants would settle on their land in the spring of 1775. With this in mind, Joseph Johnson had worked hard during the fall of 1774 to secure from each of the "seven Towns" a least a few recruits ready to proceed, and believed that he had obtained commitments from about sixty people, including "from Mohegan 10, from Narraganset 20, from Montauk on Long Island 13, from Nihantuck 5, from Farmington 10." Individuals from Stonington and Groton were to follow.<sup>41</sup> But by spring, leaving New England had become problematic. Even before the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April of 1775, prospective emigrants to the Oneida Country were looked upon by their New England neighbors as potential recruits to British-sympathizing Iroquois forces. Worried that an historic opportunity would be permanently lost if no one showed up to begin tilling the tract promised, Joseph Johnson tried hard to rally at least a portion of the sixty who had earlier agreed to emigrate. He finally induced about fifteen individuals to accompany him west, including individuals from Charlestown,

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40 Joseph Johnson 209.

41 Joseph Johnson 253.

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Montauk, Farmington and Mohegan.<sup>42</sup> Arriving with this small cohort at Guy Park, Colonel Guy Johnson's residence, Joseph Johnson related their adventures in extricating themselves from rebel New England. One member of the group had been warned that if he "went to the Six Nations, he would be made to fight against the People." Because of such threats, explained Joseph Johnson to Colonel Guy Johnson on March 25, 1775,

our People were put in fear of their Lives for Coming away, and I was, for my part desperately threatened, particularly as I came thro' Farmington where the People ordered us to stop, and told us we Shou'd stay, and fight the Regulars that were Coming to take our Land and Religion from us. I told them I could not believe that and it seemed to me Matter of great Surprize that as the People of New England had got almost all our Lands from us, and thereby Oblig'd us to go else where, Should want to Stop us now, when a Year ago they wanted to get rid of us.<sup>43</sup>

Joseph Johnson's advance party was not able to stay in the Oneida Country for long. The American Revolution was spreading, not dying down. Within months, Colonel Guy Johnson had fled to Canada, where he began organizing raids on rebel sympathizers. Joseph Johnson and his companions took refuge in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where they were joined by Occom. In all, about forty would-be emigrants, including a sizeable number from Farmington, spent the War years in Stockbridge.

The decision to take refuge in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, rather than in their ancestral settlements in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Long Island demonstrated that leaders of the emigration had irreversibly thrown in their lot with one another and with other Christian tribal communities. Occom and his associates had resolved never to return to their old settlements, with their interminable disputes about hereditary sachems and lands leased to whites. The

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42 Joseph Johnson 259.

43 Joseph Johnson 255.

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emigrants had broken free, and when compelled to leave the Oneida Country, they strategically *retreated* to Stockbridge, choosing not to *return* to their old homes in southern New England.

Regrouping and consolidating his followers in Stockbridge, Occom gambled that the New England emigration project could be salvaged once the War came to an end.

Occom had long been pursuing a difficult course, in attending responsibly to the material and spiritual needs of his community while trying simultaneously to ingratiate himself with the establishments in the New England colonies, the royally administered regions of interior North America and Great Britain itself. When the Revolution erupted, Occom and those close to him became suspect to both Tories and Revolutionaries. Primarily interested in helping his own community, Occom initially held aloof. Before long however, Occom threw in his lot with the Revolution. Displaying his new outspokenness, Occom wrote the still-wavering Oneidas in support of the Revolution,

Beloved Brethren...I will now give you a little insight into the Nature of the English Quarrils over the great Waters. They got to be rich, I mean the Nobles and the great, and they are very Proud and they keep the rest of their Brethren under their Feet, they make Slaves of them. The great ones have got all the Land and the rest are poor Tenants---and the People in this Country live more upon a leavel and they live happy, and the former Kings of England use to let the People in this Country have their Freedom and Liberty; but the present King of England wants to make them Slaves to himself, and the People in this Country don't want to be Slaves,---and so they are come over to kill them, and the People here are oblig'd to Defend themselves, they don't go over the great Lake to kill them. And now I think you must see who is the oppresser and who are the oppressed and now I think, if you must join on one way or other you cant join the oppresser, but will help the oppressed.<sup>44</sup>

While Occom stayed in Stockbridge promoting the rebel cause, Joseph Johnson traveled with the same objective. Sadly, he did not have long to live, dying in unknown circumstances in

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44 Love 229. Undated letter, probably spring 1776.

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the latter part of 1776 or early in 1777. In the year before his death, he like Occom tried to mediate between the rebel colonies and the Oneidas and their “Six Nations” allies. The climax of these efforts came on February 20, 1776, when he met with General George Washington at his Cambridge, Massachusetts headquarters, and offered to undertake a mission to what he called the “Back Nations,” that is, to tribes beyond the colonies’ frontiers. General Washington gave Johnson a letter in which he described himself as the person “whom the Whole United Colonies have chosen to be their Chief Warrior” and instructed Johnson to inform the western tribes “that we don’t want them to take up the hatchet for us except they chuse it, we only desire that they will not fight against us.”<sup>45</sup>

One bitter consequence of Occom’s support for the Revolution was the loss of missionary donations from Great Britain. “Converting the Indians” had long been a more popular cause in Great Britain than in the colonies, but all of Occom’s work to develop British interest in his community was negated by the rupture with the colonies. In an attempt to find new sources of support among Revolutionaries, leaders of the New England emigrants in 1780 sent out from Stockbridge an appeal lamenting that “all [British] Funds of Money for the Spread of the Gospel among the Indians are Stop’d.”<sup>46</sup>

The concept that would be realized in 1785 as Brothertown, New York, had been beset from the outset by a string of calamities, any one of which would have been sufficient to destroy a project with less committed leadership. The 1774 death of the project’s first and most important patron, Sir William Johnson, was only partially offset by the formal written agreement

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45 Joseph Johnson 281-82.

46 Love 240.

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recorded by Sir William's successor. The Revolution that broke out in 1775 brought further calamities, not least of which was the death of Occom's enterprising twenty-five-year-old son-in-law Joseph Johnson.

When the War ended, the still-resilient Occom began planning for an early return to the Oneida Country. Whether many Oneidas would be returning was uncertain, but clearly Colonel Guy Johnson and pro-British Iroquois would no longer be a factor. And a huge new positive factor was to be added to the equation, because of the decision by several hundred Stockbridge Mahicans to join in the attempt to build a strong Christian nucleus in the Oneidas' ancestral homeland. It was therefore possible in 1784 to look forward with renewed hope to fulfillment of the dream that had been first articulated in 1773.

Prior to his death in 1774, Sir William had been accurately perceived by all concerned as the key figure responsible for allowing the New England emigration to proceed. After the Revolution, New York State replaced Sir William's royal regime as the new ultimate authority whose sanction was needed. In 1774, the royal colony of New York had exercised no authority in the Oneida Country. In 1784, the independent and sovereign State of New York as successor to the British monarch claimed jurisdiction over the entire Oneida Country. How the Oneidas would fit into the land rights picture as defined by New York State remained uncertain. But Occom and the Stockbridge Mahicans decided to force the issue by moving to the Oneida Country and once there attempting to negotiate new terms with the Oneidas and New York State. The American Revolution was a time when boldness and vision were often (if not always) rewarded. In this spirit, Occom and the Stockbridge Mahicans set out to make post-

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Revolutionary homes for themselves in New York State. Sir William Johnson was no longer there to protect them. New York State was an untested authority in the Oneida Country. The Oneidas themselves were a drastically altered community. Despite all these uncertainties, Occom decided the goal was worth the risk.