

# HISTORIC BRIGHTON NEWS

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NUMBER 1

## DR. DAVID ANDERSON TO SPEAK AT ANNUAL MEETING FEB. 2



*Storyteller David Anderson enthralls young audiences.*

The February meeting of Historic Brighton will be held **Sunday, February 2, 2003 at the Brighton Fire Station, 3100 East Avenue at 2:00 P.M.** Dr. David Anderson, chairman of the Rochester-Monroe County Freedom Trail Commission is the speaker. His talk, "Striding Toward Freedom: The Legacy," will focus on the Underground Railway and will feature the Rochester-

Monroe County Freedom Trail Commission's effort to involve youths in researching the trail from Austin Steward to Frederick Douglass. The Commission is an appointed body charged with identifying and interpreting Underground Railroad locations, personalities and events. He will also discuss the commissions initiatives: the "Year of Frederick Douglass," "Men of Color, to Arms," and the Frederick Douglass Academy. Dr. Anderson is a well-known scholar and writer about black history in the Rochester area. He is also a storyteller, performer, and photographer.

His books include *The Origin of Life on Earth: an African Creation Myth*, *The Rebellion of Humans: An African Spiritual Journey*, and *Kwanzaa: an Everyday Resource and Instructional Guide*. He contributed to *Jump Up and Say: a Collection of Black Storytelling* and to *Images "Afro-Rochester."*

Anderson has shared stories with audiences in 18 states and abroad. He has portrayed many historical figures in local performances and won numerous awards for his writings and outstanding contributions to the arts. **1**

The Feb. 2 meeting is also the Annual Meeting for Historic Brighton. Members will vote on the slate for board members that includes new candidates **Nancy Robbins** and **Hannelore Heyer**. Board members seeking re-election are **Patrica Aslin** and **Betsy Brayer**.

## MONROE AVE. WAS A PLANK ROAD IN 1850

BY LEO DODD

"**MERCHANTS WANT TAXES USED ON MONROE**" read the headlines in the *Brighton Pittsford Post* of Oct. 30, 2002. The article went on to say that these same "merchants want to see more change in the coming years along the road that traverses Pittsford, Brighton and Rochester. The overall goal is to make Monroe Ave. a "Main Street for Monroe County."

Past Brighton Town leaders such as Gideon Cobb, Isaac Moore and Leonard Buckland would certainly agree with that statement. That trio was part of an investment group formed in 1850. Yes, 152 years ago, community members took local control of the identical 6.5-mile route to establish



*Construction worker on plank road.*

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# MONROE AVE. WAS A PLANK ROAD IN 1850

an improved road. And it was successful—for a time. In that year their investment resulted in the latest of technological road achievements—the plank road.

“We consider plank roads one of the most beneficial inventions, for common travel, ever introduced into our country,” said the magazine *Scientific American* in 1854. “The materials to construct them can be obtained in almost every part of our extended domains, and we cannot but speak strongly of their usefulness, utility, and economy, and endeavor to impress upon the minds of our farmers, and those who dwell in the rural districts, the great benefits that would accrue to them by the construction of such roads between farm and farm, village and town, country and city.”<sup>1</sup>

2 Rochester, Brighton and Pittsford were originally linked by a trail that originated in Canandaigua in 1800, by the Erie Canal that arrived in 1823, and by the railway that arrived in 1840’s. But they were also separated. The small towns that grew up within our county were separated by only a few miles, but these few miles were dirt paths: muddy with rain, frozen with snow, impassable at times, and difficult for commerce. State and national governments were anxious to expand the railways, but investment was costly. New York railroads cost \$40,000 per mile; a plank road could be built for \$2,000 per mile. One advantage of such roads is that every farmer can use them with his own vehicle of conveyance. With railroad and canal, you need a specifically designed carrier for a specific roadbed. Plank roads, if carefully constructed, can be traveled over at speeds up to fifteen miles per hour.

The history of plank roads in Brighton extends for approximately thirty-years. Plank roads were developed by private investment, following the laws of New York State. Brighton produced four corporations that constructed Plank Roads:

1. East Ave.
2. Monroe Ave.
3. East Henrietta Rd.
4. West Henrietta Rd.

These roads were constructed over short distances—five miles the average—brought about by the desire of the small towns to become connected to the major cities. Texts were written to describe



*A clear representation of what roads look like when moisture is applied to clay and dirt. Plank roads were constructed to eliminate that condition.*

the construction methods, which were available to all communities, and roads were designed accordingly. Expectations were high for heavy use and low maintenance. Most citizens saw the Plank Road System as a “win-win” enterprise—hopefully bringing great profits to investors.

Plank roads were made of boards and as long as they were properly maintained, provided a smooth surface. They were constructed by laying planks of pine or oak, eight to sixteen feet long and three to four inches thick, across “sleepers” or “stringers” that were placed parallel to the direction of the road. Ditches were dug on either side of the road to provide proper drainage.

“The tolls which the farmers pay are not taxes,” *The Scientific American* commented. “In one sense of the term, they are saved in the larger loads they are enabled to draw. The greater speed at which they are enabled to travel, the wear and tear of harness gearing and animal strength; and, finally, if it were for nothing more, than the pleasure of riding on a smooth plank road in comparison with an old corduroy one, hardhearted must be the man who would not pay for it.”<sup>2</sup>

Not all saw it that way. The famous humorist Mark Twain left us the classic description of this

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# MONROE AVE. WAS A PLANK ROAD IN 1850

type of road. Asked how he liked his trip over the Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids Plank Road, he replied, "It would have been good if some unconscionable scoundrel had not now and then dropped a plank across it."

The editors of *Scientific American* called plank roads "The Farmer's Railroad":

"We consider plank roads one of the most beneficial inventions, for common travel, ever introduced into our country. The materials to construct them can be obtained in almost every part of our extended domains, and we cannot but speak strongly of their usefulness, utility, and economy, and endeavor to impress upon the minds of our farmers, and those who dwell in the rural districts, the great benefits that would accrue to them by the construction of such roads between farm and farm, village and town, country and city. The parties most interested in good common roads are those who own carriages and horses our farmers chiefly. For public travel and the transport of heavy goods, railroads are the choice. But when a farmer wishes to draw a load of potatoes, or wheat, or butter, a short distance to market, he cannot afford to pay for a steam carriage to draw the same on a common road; he therefore employs the means which are at his command; he harnesses his team and drives it jocund, whistling."<sup>3</sup>

The plank road phenomenon ebbed before the Civil War due to the rapid deterioration of the roads, insufficient revenues, and competition from railroads. The thirty years between 1850 and 1880 saw the rise and decline of plank roads here.

One tollhouse for the Monroe Ave. Plank Road did survive into the 1900's, at the intersection of Shepherd Street and Monroe Ave, and was torn down in 1925 to make room for a proposed building.

The time of incorporation is well documented but the ending is uncertain. The Civil War began ten-years after the start of the road, and maintenance became a huge unforeseen problem. It is likely that the road system was abandoned, as were all of these roads throughout the United States. But they stood, for a time, as tribute to local investment and

management, when Brighton, along with its neighboring towns, was building an infrastructure for commerce.

<sup>1</sup> *Scientific American*, v. 9, n. 30, Apr. 8, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> *Scientific American*, v 6, n. 39, June 14, 1851

<sup>3</sup> *Scientific American* v. 9, n. 30, Apr. 8, 1854

## The Cast of Characters in 1850:

### BRIGHTON-PITTSFORD TOLL ROAD DIRECTORS

**Isaac Moore**, 63, president of the corporation, did not live on Monroe Ave. but on Clover Street. A successful Brighton merchant with proven leadership capabilities, Moore was often the founder and cheerleader for Brighton causes.

**Ira Bellows**, vice president, was a Pittsford businessman and former Pittsford Supervisor (1841).

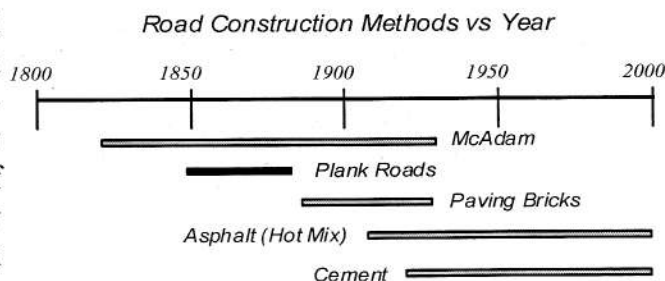
**Stephen Otis**, 44, director, lived on Monroe Ave next to Schoolhouse #8, and across from Gideon Cobb. Otis was a founder of the Rochester Brick & Tile Co. on Monroe Ave, and would benefit greatly by the ability to move products cheaply and speedily to city contractors.

**Gideon Cobb**, 59, director, was a Brighton brick maker with home and factory on Monroe Ave. Cobb had a long history as a road developer, from the beginning of Rochester as a frontier settlement. His ox team moved many a tree stump in early Rochester and Brighton road development.

**Leonard Buckland**, 39, Brighton brick maker had a factory and home on the nearby North-South Road (Winton Road.)

**Ebenezer Bowen**, director, was a Brighton Physician & Farmer living near Stephen and Gideon.

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# HOW ROCHESTER GREW AND BRIGHTON SHRANK



*In the 1810s, Brighton was bounded by the Genesee River to the west, Lake Ontario to the north, and Henrietta and Pittsford to the south.*

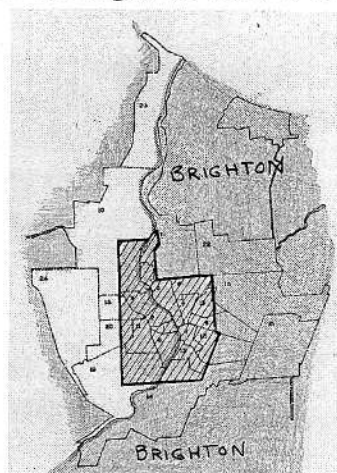


*Rochesterville in 1817 was located entirely west of the river in the town of Gates. In 1812, State Senator Nathaniel Rochester arranged to have a bridge*

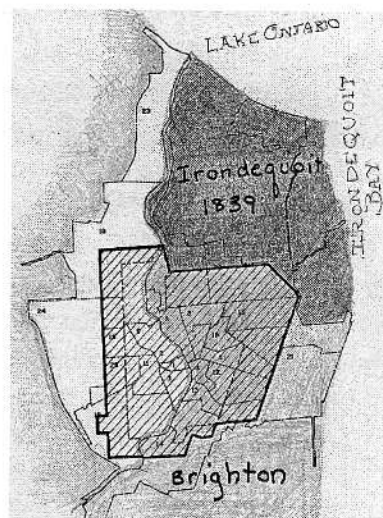
*cross the Genesee at Rochesterville—the only bridge north of Avon. In 1821, during the presidency of James Monroe, Nathaniel Rochester arranged for a new county to be formed. Naturally, Rochester was the Monroe County seat. He then arranged to have the Erie Canal come through his village, leaving 12 other communities—including Tryon and Brighton Village—agape. Rochester's population soared from 750 in 1817 to 13,000 in 1934. In 1823 the village crossed the river, annexing 357 acres of Brighton.*



*In 1826, the village of Rochester received its second charter, pushing deeper into Brighton.*



*The first Rochester city charter in 1834 added 3,581 acres to the municipality—much of that acreage coming from Brighton.*



*Rochester doubled in area in 1874, with all boundaries moving outward, including those between the city and Brighton. Earlier, in 1839, Irondequoit was formed from the northern portion of Brighton. In 1901, 165 acres were taken from Brighton south of Elmwood Ave. and west of South Ave. In 1905, Brighton Village and the Cobbs Hill area were annexed and in 1913 areas north and south of the former Brighton Village were taken.*

## PLANK ROAD DIRECTORS (continued from page 3)

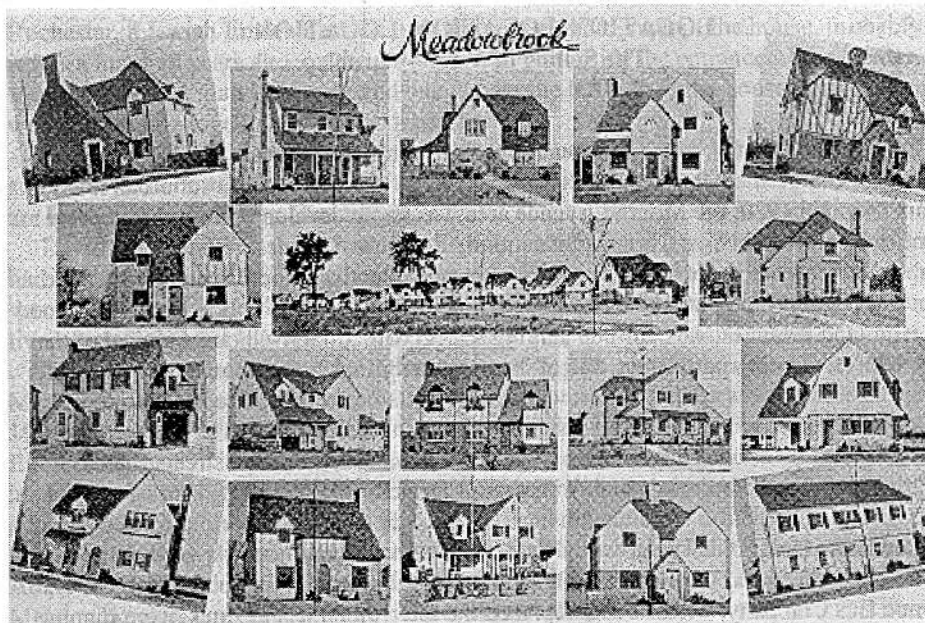
**Adam Sherman**, 69, director, was a Brighton farmer.

**George W. Pratt**, 45, was a Rochester Banker.

These eight men—six from Brighton, one from Rochester, and one from Pittsford—invested a total of \$21,000 to construct and operate The Roches-

ter Brighton Pittsford Plank Road system. This investment converted to today's dollars would equal approximately \$420,000. Six of the men were considered farmers, while four men had connections to the brick industry of Brighton.

# THE MEADOWBROOK NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION



*The Kodak Magazine, March 1930 issue promoting Meadowbrook homes.*

**BY ROBYN SCHAEFER**

By April of 1931, ninety-two lots in Meadowbrook had been filled. As families moved in and began to meet one another, a sense of community quickly developed. Families helped and watched out for each other. People became involved with community concerns and interests they had in common.... This led to the formation of the Meadowbrook Association—first called to order on Nov. 15, 1931.

The gathering was a unique concept for the early 1930s and was one of the earliest organizations of its kind in the United States. The agenda centered on...securing adequate police protection for the rural tract.... Eventually security became less of an issue when the Rochester Sheriff's Department explained that there would be a police car on duty at night, available to Brighton.

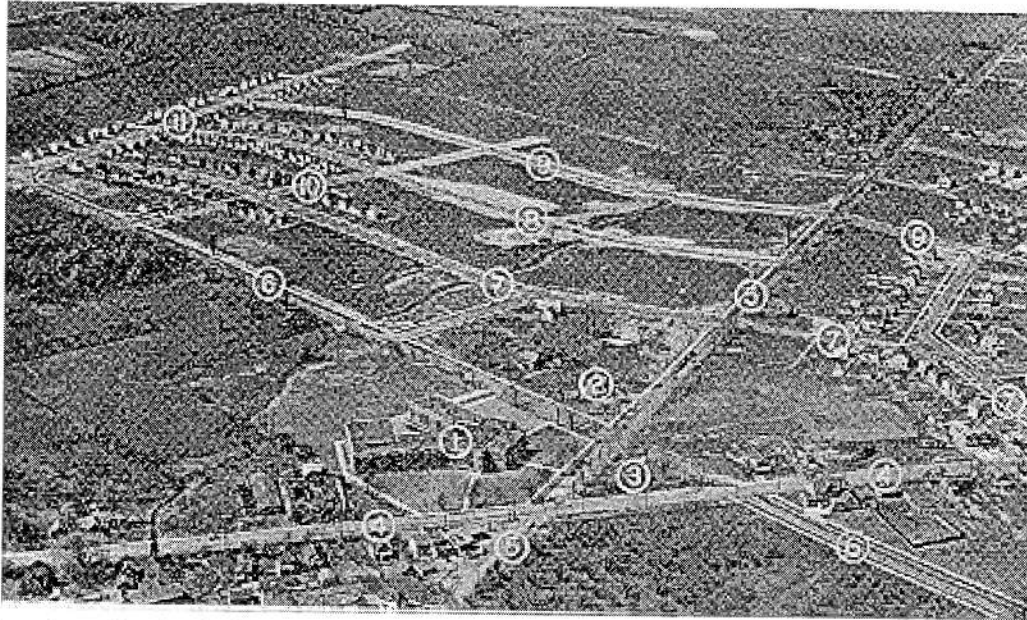
Less than a month later, the group had developed an organized association complete with seven specific committees, each with its own chairman. The President's Committee included a representative from every six to eight families to act as link between residents and association. The Membership Committee introduced new members to the community. The Floral Committee sent appropriate pieces to neighbors in the event of personal bereavement. The Tract Committee's main concern

was the removal of a swamp across Winton Road—considered a breeding place for mosquitoes. It also addressed the dumping of refuse in the tract as well as traffic signs and streetlights. The Social Committee arranged community-social affairs. Taxation and Town Affairs Committee watched town business as it affected Meadowbrook. Lastly, a By-Law Committee formulated the rules and a voluntary 50-cent per family contribution facilitated the work of the association....

Early events and concerns included a caroling party for children, a skating rink, general garbage collection, Wednesday evening softball games as well as dances at the firehouse, card parties and golf tournaments. By far the most popular event was the annual Meadowbrook picnic—a three-day occasion! The festivities began Friday night with an adults-only tent raising party that included a tapped barrel. Saturday morning a parade for children was followed by baseball games, races, pony rides, and an abundance of food and prizes for everyone. The picnic ended with a popular raffle in the evening. Area businesses and neighbors donated prizes. Sunday morning the neighbors gathered once again for the tent folding and clean up. As vacant lots were filled, the picnic moved about.... In 1999, the event was changed again to a Children's

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# THE MEADOWBROOK NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION



*Meadowbrook, and indeed all of Brighton, was a sparsely populated and still rural community in the 1930s.*

Parade and Ice Cream Social.

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From the 60s through the early 80s, more time and effort was focused on the parade than at any other time. Sections of streets and groups of families joined together in constructing elaborate floats that reflected the theme chosen that year. There was a judges' stand and ribbons were awarded to the most creative displays. Newspapers reported the event. The Children's Parade remains popular today. The children enjoy dressing up and marching along with the fire and police vehicles with the French Road School band leading the way.

Now the annual picnic has become our September Block Party. A section of one of our neighborhood streets is blocked from traffic and a large area is set up with decorated tables. A buffet is assembled...A disc jockey and Karaoke provide music....A resurgence of participation has prompted the addition of other elements....

The year 2003 is the Meadowbrook Neighborhood Association's 72<sup>nd</sup> year, which makes it one of the oldest continuously functioning neighborhood associations in Western New York. The purpose and goals have not changed much since its founding, except for nearly forty years the board of directors consisted only of men! ...Eventually women directors became involved, starting as co-directors with their husbands. In 2001, women filled

all four official positions....

Good-hearted and friendly neighbors who unite in appreciation of our beautiful neighborhood inspire the participation needed to enable our association to continue for another 72 years!

*This article is one of a continuing series of excerpts from Robyn Schaefer's "98 Acres: The Story of Meadowbrook," published in 2001.*

## **HISTORIC BRIGHTON**

FOUNDED 1999

Monica Gilligan, President  
Maureen Holtzman, Vice-President  
Janet Hopkin, Secretary  
Patricia Aslin, Treasurer

## **Board of Directors**

Maureen Holtzman, Program chair  
Diana Robinson, Membership chair  
Dee Dee Teegarden, Hospitality chair  
Josie Leyens, Hospitality chair  
Betsy Brayer, Historic Brighton News editor  
Arlene A. Wright, Long Range Planning chair  
Helen Berkeley, Nominating Committee chair  
Catherine Zukosky, Publicity chair  
Leo Dodd, Buckland/Gonsenhauser chair  
Mary Jo Lanphear, Town of Brighton Historian



## THE FIRST HUMAN INHABITANTS OF BRIGHTON

BY BETSY BRAYER

The first human inhabitants of Brighton were the Archaic Algonkin. From their crude tools of stone and bone left along the shores of Irondequoit Bay, we think that small wandering groups came and went in search of food. Eskimos wandered through to hunt and fish, leaving their typical knives of rubbed slate.

The Intermediate Algonkin polished their stones and bones, including antlers. They used acorns and nuts and pulverized seeds. They dried meat, fish and mussels in huge quantities—apparently for barter. During their later stages they made crude pottery and soapstone dishes. The still used javelins and spears, but their arrows were more plentiful. They often lived in large encampments.

Thousands of years later, the third Algonkian people made excellent decorated pottery. They cultivated corn, beans, squashes, tobacco, and sunflowers and collected the wild plants of the forest. They were peaceful, but strong enough to clear the area of human enemies.

Then came the invasion of the mound people—exceedingly tall and long limbed, who used measurement and were able to shape objects symmetrically. They quarried flinty rocks that they turned into large and beautiful chipped blades and were expert in the use of native copper, producing ornaments and weapons by a beating process. They did not melt and cast it but cut and engraved the sheet metal. They were skilled workers in shell too—indicating contact with the coast.

Traditionally, it was believed that the Algonkin migrated west to east, crossing a land bridge over the Bering Strait. Several scholars now think that some early people came from Europe. They deduce this from the type of skulls and artifacts found in Eastern states that resemble those of prehistoric peoples in France not Asia.

Either way, there was a leisurely shifting of villages sites as they became uninhabitable, due to the accumulation of refuse, lack of firewood, and scarcity of game. Lake Erie separated the migrating tribes; one part went to Canada, one to New



A 1927 map of Ellison Park in Brighton shows the Ox Bow of Irondequoit Creek where a Seneca Village once stood.

York State. Where the two branches united at the St Lawrence River, there was peace—the northern tribe being hunters, the southern cultivators—but then both tribes went into the forest to hunt. Since 7,000 acres of forest hunting ground was needed to support one tribe, difficulties began and raids were common. According to legend, one cold night, the hungry and envious northern tribe sneaked into the successful southern tribe's camp and murdered them as they slept. Fearing a further massacre, the southern tribe crossed the Appalachian Mountains into the Mohawk Valley.

Ø

In 1300 AD, during the period of the greatest development of the early settlers, the Iroquois fought their way up the Allegheny and Ohio rivers or along the south shore of Lake Erie and swooped into the GEN-IS-HE-YO—their word meaning “pleasant valley.” Their vanguards built hilltop fortifications from which to explore and eventually conquer and destroy. The Algonkian people who were not exterminated probably fled to New England or down the Susquehanna, Delaware, Ohio and Allegheny rivers or crossed the Niagara or Detroit rivers to find refuge.

The all-conquering power of the Iroquois spread terror to the less organized Algonkin. The Iroquois (an Algonkian word for “real adder”) knit its society through families, clans, and nations. The Sen-

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## THE FIRST INHABITANTS OF BRIGHTON

*Continued from page 7*

Seneca people, who had a village at the Ox Bow of Irondequoit Creek in today's Ellison Park, acted as a unit:

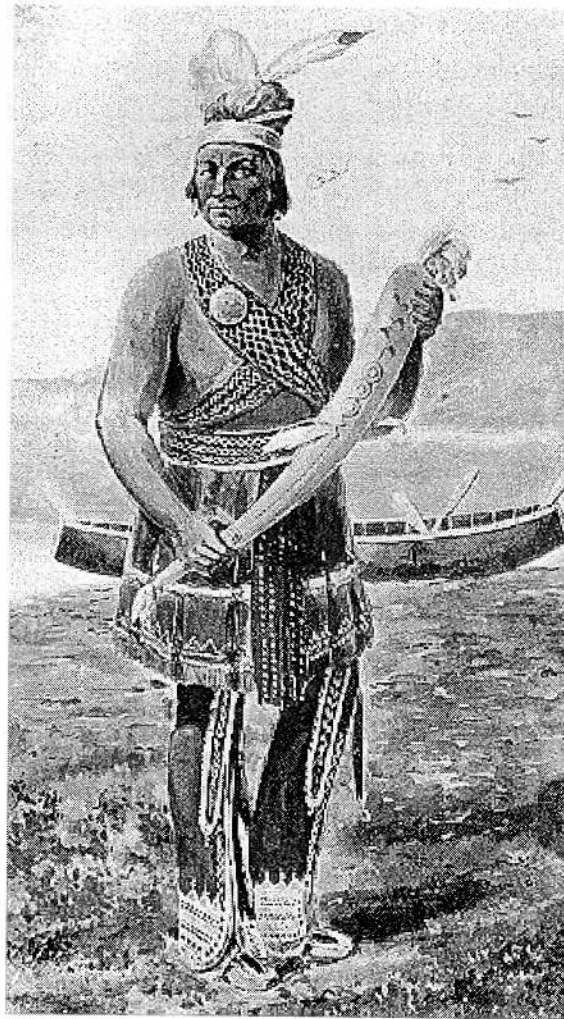
A self-sufficient community, the Senecas had traditions, a stable economy and leadership, decorated pottery, copper weapons and shell ornaments. The tribal meeting place in Brighton under a giant elm is still marked by a council rock.

In 1570 the Seneca nation joined with four neighboring Iroquois nations in a chain of friendship. Each nation had special duties and privileges. The Mohawk guarded the Eastern Door on the Mohawk River (near Schenectady). They received ambassadors, collected tribute, reported invasions, and were poised to hold the Mahikan people of the Hudson Valley in check. The Oneida were regarded as younger brothers who watched over captives and received small groups for adoption. The central Onondaga in the hill country south of the lake of the same name, were to "preserve the Council Fire," moderate the League Assembly that met every two years, and keep the confederate records. The Cayuga, along their lake, were called "pipe bearers" and were also considered "younger brothers."

The Seneca held the largest region—west to the Genesee—and faced the largest number of enemies. It's duty was to guard the Western Door, collect tribute and receive ambassadors.

The Seneca wanted the Huron to join too. The Huron lived in what is now Canada and did not trust the Seneca. The two nations had been warring for many years.

The Five Nations of the Iroquois controlled the Mohawk Trail from Albany to Buffalo, the top of the escarpment now called Ridge Road from Oswego to Niagara Falls. They also controlled the portage route from the Indian Landing on Irondequoit Creek in today's Ellison Park just south of the Pinnacle Hills (now Highland Ave.) to the juncture of Red Creek and the Genesee River in Genesee Valley Park. Portaged canoes could be launched to complete the water route from St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario to the Ohio Valley, the entire Susquehanna and Mississippi basins



*A Seneca in the costume of about 1800. Reproduced from an engraving in the League of the Iroquois by Lewis Henry Morgan.*

and the Gulf of Mexico.

The Seneca lived in villages with a distinctly different lifestyle than their wandering, hunter-gatherer predecessors. A Seneca village was a stockaded settlement, usually on a hilltop for security. Many families lived together in longhouses covered with bark. Each family had its own fire and place to sleep.

The Seneca men were hunters. The Seneca women cleared land around their scattered villages to plant corn, squash, pumpkin, and tobacco. They picked peaches and apples from their orchards and wild berries and herbs.

*Next HBN article for younger readers: "The Game of Empire between France and England."*