



TEKAWENNAKE

SIX NATIONS & NEW CREDIT NEWS

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Historic gathering will result in second film project

by Dr. John Bacher

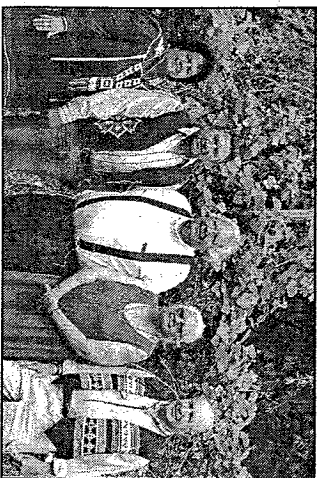


Photo credit: Danny Beaton
Elders Maisie Shenandoah, Clayton Logan, John Mohawk, Audrey Shenandoah, and Oren Lyons were at Six Nations this month filming a documentary outlining traditional native views on environmental sustainability.

SOUR SPRINGS — A sacred gathering at the Grand River Territory home of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy took place July 10 on the organic farm of Mohawk elders Lehman and Alice Gibson. Here, traditional elders from the oldest continuously functioning government on the continent gathered to take part in an upcoming film project, *The Iroquois Speak Out for Mother Earth*.

The assembly on the Gibson farm was organized by Mohawk filmmaker Danny Beaton, who has been given the name Ronkweatason. He has produced three films for national television and photographed traditional elders for many years for the American Indian Institute/Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth, an annual spiritual assembly.

Beaton has successfully campaigned for many of their concerns, such as trying to stop a proposed hotel that would have destroyed an ancient temple site on the shores of Miami Beach, Florida.

Beaton is unique among Canadian filmmakers in bringing forth the messages of Confederacy elders, from the ancestral homeland of the Iroquois. These spiritual leaders have bravely battled the forces of organized crime and corporate polluters, while galvanizing public opinion around the defense of the environment. Two of the leaders featured in this film, John Mohawk, a Seneca negotiator, and Onondaga Chief Oren Lyons are also professors at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo.

Recognized as leaders of legal governments in New York



Photo credit: Alicia Rozanska
Toronto-based filmmaker Danny Beaton with Maisie Shenandoah at the farm of local elders Lehman and Alice Gibson earlier this month.

State — unlike the Indian Act-imposed Iroquois governments of Canada — the Confederacy elders have struggled in defense of their ancient, earth-centred culture. They seek to perpetuate the secret-message of the Confederacy founder, the Peacemaker, a visionary Huron who brought the message of Peace, Power and Righteousness to Haudenosaunee homeland of the Finger Lakes.

The site of the Gibson farm was well chosen for a documentary about the spiritual earth revering values of Native American elders. In the past decade it has served as a birthplace for a new explosion of interest in organic farming along the Grand River; as life in this local garden bursts forth itself with frogs flourishing in a new windmill-assisted pond.

The Gibson's neighbors are now awake to the potential of open pollinated organic seeds, from cultivars developed by the ancestors over thousands of years, immune to corporate control by petrochemical companies.

During the film shoot Lehman Gibson and the elders discussed a wide variety of topics relating to ecological agriculture. These ranged from impoverishment of the soil from extinction of the phosphorous bearing Passenger Pigeon to the devastation of the American Chestnut from imported blight.

Seneca elder Clayton Logan, a traditional ceremonial leader, and Onondaga Clannothers Audrey and Maisie

Shenandoah spoke on how the traditional ways of the Iroquois provided hope for those seeking a sustainable relationship with the earth. Surrounded by the three sacred sisters of corn, beans and squash, and the abundance of berries and Indian tobacco on the Gibson farm, they explained how their traditions provided a way for human needs to be met without inflicting harm on Mother Earth.

Surrounded by corn, John Mohawk outlined one of the most serious dangers faced by the earth, Global Warming. Mohawk explained how devastation based on the burning of fossils that died millions of years ago is the most serious consequence of all human actions over the past two centuries. He noted that while this activity was once on a minute scale, intended originally just to replace charcoal with coal for smelting, it has exploded with catastrophic results on the atmosphere. Warning that even if this fossil burning activity were to cease immediately, the impact of the accumulated carbon would endure for centuries. Mohawk traces this disaster to the arrogant Utopian aspects of Western Civilization. These attitudes, as he explains in his recent book, are inherent in Utopian mentalities which justify an assault on nature in the name of achieving impossible standards of human perfection.

Oren Lyons explained another danger faced by the planet, nuclear devastation, in terms of seeing it as a fulfillment of ancient Hopi prophecies telling of people releasing monsters from deep within the earth, Monsters which would emerge to devastate humanity. These monsters, Oren explained, have already been unleashed, as witnessed by the terrible rate of cancers among uranium miners. This has soared upwards as high as a 90 percent fatality rate among Native American miners in U.S. Southwest. Rather than seeking relief from nuclear war through destabilizing, costly Star Wars-style nuclear shields, Lyons urges that such weapons of mass destruction be abolished.

The setting of the film *The Iroquois Speak Out for Mother Earth* kept true to the traditions of the elders to whom it gave voice. It was a gathering where those true to the ideals of the Peacemaker came together to use their good minds to come up with solutions for the benefit of humanity and Mother Earth. Through such gatherings, the teachings of the elders can inspire those of new generations who face difficult challenges, such as reversing global warming and putting the nuclear genie back in the bottle.

The mother of film director and producer Danny Beaton, was a Mohawk who grew up in Ohswetken. Danny says the elders carry the wisdom of their ancestors with them. He wants people to respect our elders because they "still have earth values and concern for our children's good health." This new film, Beaton believes, will inspire inspire people to be real and educate society of the need to honour and protect the earth.

"What I am doing is documenting the spiritual leaders of this continent and their way of life, and sharing that with the people who are lost, in the biggest way that I can," says Beaton. "Our elders are saying that humanity's strength is by giving thanks to our Mother, because she gives us everything we need to survive."

The film shoot was funded by the Anglican Church in support of environmental protection and sacred native values. Fujii Film Canada has been gracious in donating all film required.

John Bacher is a doctor of history and author on environmental topics. He lives in St. Catharines