

Dekanawidah The Peacemaker Is a Native American one of the founders of the United States Constitution?

Introduction:

Among the Native Americans who inhabited what is now the United States and Canada, the most complex and successful political alliance was the Iroquois Confederation. It was formed in the fifteenth century, and established a working peace among the principal "nations" that formed part of the Iroquoian group.

1. Name: Iroquois Confederation, Longhouse?

Date: 1400-1500 AD

2. Family Name of Prophet:

Unknown

3. Holy Name:

Dekanawidah ('two river-currents flowing together.'
(The Peace Maker) An Iroquois prophet, statesman, and lawgiver.

4. Name for God:

Orenda or "Holy Spirit"
which gave Dekanawidah the knowledge of his mission.

5. Name for Promised One:

Unknown.

6. Birth Legends and Life:

"Dekanawidah was born near the Bay of Quinte, in the vicinity of Kingston, in southeastern Ontario, Canada in what then was probably Huron territory. He was reputed to have been one of 7 brothers.

Omens foreshadowed his birth, and portents accompanying this event revealed the fact to his virgin mother that Dekanawidah would be the source of evil to her people, referring to the destruction of the Huron confederation by that of the Iroquois.

Hence at his birth his mother and grandmother sought to spare the Hurons by attempting to drown the newborn infant by thrusting it through a hole made in the ice covering a neighboring river. Three attempts were made, but in the morning after each attempt the young Dekanawidah was found unharmed in the arms of the astonished mother. Thereupon the two women decided that it was decreed that he should live, and so resolved to rear him.

Rapidly he grew to manhood, and then, saying that he must take up his foreordained work, departed southward, first assuring his mother that in the event of his death by violence or sorcery, the otter skin flayed entire which, with the head downward, he had hung in a corner of the lodge, would vomit blood.

Tradition gives him rank with the demigods, owing to the masterful Orenda or magic power with which he worked tirelessly to overcome the obstacles and difficulties of his task, the astuteness he displayed in negotiation, and the wisdom he exhibited in framing the laws and in establishing the fundamental principles on which they were based and on which rested the entire structure of the Iroquois confederation.

During his travels, he associated himself with a Mohawk tribal lord in what is now New York, and named him Hahyonhwatha (Hiawatha) (He who has misplaced something, but knows where to find it). Hiawatha left his family and friends, and joined Dekanawidah in his travels, becoming his chief spokesman.

One legend has it that Dekanawidah, while brilliant, had a speech impediment, and depended on Hiawatha to do his public speaking for him. Together, they traveled the length and breadth of the lands on the south shores of Lakes Erie and Ontario, as well as the river to the sea, now known as the St. Lawrence. These were the homelands of tribes with a common heritage, but who had been warring with one another for many years.

Dekanawidah united them into a League of Nations that we now call the Iroquois League. Centuries later, Longfellow "borrowed" the name of Hiawatha to be his hero in a fictional legend; there is no other connection between the two Hiawathas nor their stories.

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7. Manner of Revelation: **unknown.**

Here is a Legend of Dekanawidah describing how he united the Iroquois Tribes into a confederation. It illustrates spiritual truths of the battle between "good" and "evil" so common to world Faiths. (Adodarhoh, the evil one of crooked stature, the one whom everyone followed in a time of war and bloodshed, is made straight by the "Hymn of

Peace”. Dekanawidah changes the hearts and causes them to accept his mission of bringing the five warring tribes together.

“North of the beautiful lake, in the land of the Crooked Tongues...in the village lived a good woman who had a virgin daughter. Now strangely this virgin conceived...The daughter about this time went into a long sleep and dreamed that her child should be a son whom she should name Dekanawidah. The messenger in her dream told her that he should become a great man and that he should go among the Flint people to live and that he should also go to the Many Hill Nation and there raise up the Great Tree of Peace.

The Ongwe-oweh had fought long and bravely. All the Ongwe-oweh fought other nations sometimes together and sometimes singly. Often they fought among themselves. The nation of the Flint had little sympathy for the Nation of the Great Hill, and sometimes they raided one another's settlements. Thus did brothers and Ongwe-oweh fight.

The nation of the Sunken Pole fought the Nation of the Flint and hated them...Everywhere there was peril and everywhere mourning. Men were ragged with sacrifice and the women scarred with the flints, so everywhere there was misery. Feuds with one another, feuds with outer nations, feuds with brother nations, and feuds of sister towns, and feuds of families and of clans made every warrior a stealthy man who liked to kill.

Then in those days there was no great law. Our founder had not yet come to create peace and give united strength to the Real Men, the Ongwe-oweh.

In those same days, the Onondagas had no peace. A man's life was valued as nothing. For any slight offense a man or woman was killed by his enemy and in this manner feuds started between families and clans. At night, none dared leave their doorways, lest an enemy's war club strike them down. Such was the condition when there was no Great Law.

South of the Onondaga town lived an evil-minded man...His body was distorted by seven crooks and his long tangled locks were adorned by writhing living serpents. Moreover, this monster was a devourer of raw meat, even of human flesh. He was also a master of wizardry, and by his magic he destroyed men but he could not be destroyed. Adodarhoh was the name of the evil man.

Notwithstanding the evil character of Adodarhoh the people of Onondaga, the Nation of Many Hills, obeyed his commands and though it cost many lives they satisfied his insane whims, so much did they fear him for his sorcery.

Dekanawidah requested some of the Mohawk chiefs to call a council, so messengers were sent out among the people and the council was convened. Dekanawidah said, "I,

with my co-worker, have a desire to now report on what we have done on five successive midsummer days, of five successive years.

We have obtained the consent of five nations. These are the Mohawks, the Oneidas, the Onondagas, the Cayugas, and the Senecas. Our desire is to form a compact for a union of our nations. Our next step is to seek out Adodarhoh. It is he who has always set at naught all plans for the establishment of the Great Peace. We must seek his fire and look for his smoke.

Then Dekanawidah taught the people the Hymn of Peace and the other songs. He stood before the door of the longhouse and walked before it singing the new songs. Many came and learned them so that many were strong by the magic of them when it was time to carry the Great Peace to Onondaga.

The frontier of the Onondaga country was reached and the expedition halted to kindle a fire, as was customary. Then the chiefs of the Onondagas, with their headmen, welcomed them and a great throng marched to the fireside of Adodarhoh, the singer of the Peace Hymn leading the multitude.

Then Dekanawidah himself sang and walked before the door of Adodarhoh's house. When he finished his song he walked toward Adodarhoh and held out his hand to rub it on his body and to know its inherent strength and life. Then Adodarhoh was made straight and his mind became healthy.

When Adodarhoh was made strong in rightful powers and his body had been healed, Dekanawidah addressed the three nations. He said, "We have overcome a great obstacle. It has long stood in the way of peace. The mind of Adodarhoh is now made right and his crooked parts are made straight. Now indeed may we establish the great peace.

Before we do firmly establish our union each nation must appoint a certain number of its wisest and purest men who shall be rulers, Rodiyaner. They shall be the advisers of the people and make the new rules that may be needful. These men shall be selected and confirmed by their female relations in whose lines the titles shall be hereditary. (c)

Paul Halsall Aug 1997 halsall@murray.fordham.edu

8. Revealed Book:

The Hymn of Peace, Law of the Longhouse, The Constitution of the Five Nations, The Iroquois Book of the Great Law.

“It survives after some 500 or 600 years, and was originated by people that our ancestors mistakenly considered as "savages". Some sources place the origin of the Five Nation Confederacy as early as 1390 AD, but others insist it was prepared about 1450-1500 AD; in any case, it was well before any possible contamination by European invaders.

Early explorers and colonists found the Iroquois well established, as they had been for many generations: with a democratic government; with a form of religion that acknowledged a Creator in heaven; with a strong sense of family which was based on, and controlled by a matriarchal inheritance system.”

From the inception, there were the Five Nations discussed in this Constitution, those being:

1. Mohawk: People Possessors of the Flint.
2. Onondaga: People on the Hills.
3. Seneca: Great Hill People.
4. Oneida: Granite People.
5. Cayuga: People at the Mucky Land

In about 1715, the Tuscarora: Shirt Wearing People, once part of the Iroquois peoples in a much earlier period of their history, moved up from North Carolina to avoid warfare with the invading white settlers, and were adopted into the Confederacy. At this point in time, the Iroquois controlled many parts of our now eastern states from their homelands in what is now New York State.

9. Basic Teachings:

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE IROQUOIS NATIONS:
THE GREAT BINDING LAW, GAYANASHAGOWA

Iroquois Constitution. (Excerpts)

Dekanawidah reveals the basis for his government.

1. I am Dekanawidah and with the Five Nations' Confederate Lords I plant the Tree of Great Peace...
2. Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south and one to the west. The name of these roots is The Great White Roots and their nature is Peace and Strength.

If any man or any nation outside the Five Nations shall obey the laws of the Great Peace and make known their disposition to the Lords of the Confederacy, they may

trace the Roots to the Tree and if their minds are clean and they are obedient and promise to obey the wishes of the Confederate Council, they shall be welcomed to take shelter beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves. We place at the top of the Tree of the Long Leaves an Eagle who is able to see afar. If he sees in the distance any evil approaching or any danger threatening he will at once warn the people of the Confederacy.

3. To you Adodarhoh, the Onondaga cousin Lords, I and the other Confederate Lords have entrusted the caretaking and the watching of the Five Nations Council Fire. When there is any business to be transacted and the Confederate Council is not in session, a messenger shall be dispatched either to Adodarhoh, Hononwirehtonh or Skanawatih, Fire Keepers, or to their War Chiefs with a full statement of the case desired to be considered. Then shall Adodarhoh call his cousin (associate) Lords together and consider whether or not the case is of sufficient importance to demand the attention of the Confederate Council. If so, Adodarhoh shall dispatch messengers to summon all the Confederate Lords to assemble beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves.

5. The Council of the Mohawk shall be divided into three parties as follows: Tekarihoken, Ayonhwathah and Shadেকariwade are the first party; Sharenhowaneh, Deyoenhegwenh and Oghrenghrehgowah are the second party, and Dehennakrineh, Aghstawenserenthah and Shoskoharowaneh are the third party. The third party is to listen only to the discussion of the first and second parties and if an error is made or the proceeding is irregular they are to call attention to it, and when the case is right and properly decided by the two parties they shall confirm the decision of the two parties and refer the case to the Seneca Lords for their decision. When the Seneca Lords have decided in accord with the Mohawk Lords, the case or question shall be referred to the Cayuga and Oneida Lords on the opposite side of the house.

6. I, Dekanawidah, appoint the Mohawk Lords the heads and the leaders of the Five Nations Confederacy. The Mohawk Lords are the foundation of the Great Peace and it shall, therefore, be against the Great Binding Law to pass measures in the Confederate Council after the Mohawk Lords have protested against them. No council of the Confederate Lords shall be legal unless all the Mohawk Lords are present.

7. Whenever the Confederate Lords shall assemble for the purpose of holding a council, the Onondaga Lords shall open it by expressing their gratitude to their cousin Lords and greeting them, and they shall make an address and offer thanks to the earth where men dwell, to the streams of water, the pools, the springs and the lakes, to the maize and the fruits, to the medicinal herbs and trees, to the forest trees for their usefulness, to the animals that serve as food and give their pelts for clothing, to the great winds and the lesser winds, to the Thunderers, to the Sun, the mighty warrior, to the moon, to the messengers of the Creator who reveal his wishes and to the Great Creator who dwells in the heavens above, who gives all the things useful to men, and who is the source and the ruler of health and life. Then shall the Onondaga Lords declare the council open. The council shall not sit after darkness has set in.

8. The Firekeepers shall formally open and close all councils of the Confederate Lords, and they shall pass upon all matters deliberated upon by the two sides and render their decision. Every Onondaga Lord (or his deputy) must be present at every Confederate Council and must agree with the majority without unwarrantable dissent, so that a unanimous decision may be rendered. If Adodarhoh or any of his cousin Lords are absent from Confederate Council, any other Firekeeper may open and close the Council, but the Firekeepers present may not give any decisions, unless the matter is of small importance.

16. If the conditions which shall arise at any future time call for an addition to or change of this law, the case shall be carefully considered and if a new beam seems necessary or beneficial, the proposed change shall be voted upon and if adopted it shall be called, "Added to the Rafters".

A Matriarchal society- Women have authority!

17. A bunch of a certain number of shell (wampum) strings each two spans in length shall be given to each of the female families in which the Lordship titles are vested. The right of bestowing the title shall be hereditary in the family of the females legally possessing the bunch of shell strings and the strings shall be the token that the females of the family have the proprietary right to the Lordship title for all time to come, subject to certain restrictions hereinafter mentioned.

18. If any Confederate Lord neglects or refuses to attend the Confederate Council, the other Lords of the Nation of which he is a member shall require their War Chief to request the female sponsors of the Lord so guilty of defection to demand his attendance of the Council. If he refuses, the women holding the title shall immediately select another candidate for the title. No Lord shall be asked more than once to attend the Confederate Council.

19. If at any time it shall be manifest that a Confederate Lord has not in mind the welfare of the people or disobeys the rules of this Great Law, the men or women of the Confederacy, or both jointly, shall come to the Council and upbraid the erring Lord through his War Chief. If the complaint of the people through the War Chief is not heeded the first time it shall be uttered again and then if no attention is given a third complaint and warning shall be given. If the Lord is contumacious the matter shall go to the council of War Chiefs. The War Chiefs shall then divest the erring Lord of his title by order of the women in whom the titleship is vested. When the Lord is deposed the women shall notify the Confederate Lords through their War Chief, and the Confederate Lords shall sanction the act. The women will then select another of their sons as a candidate and the Lords shall elect him. Then shall the Installation Ceremony install the chosen one.

36. The women heirs of each head Lord's title shall be the heirs of the War Chief's title of their respective Lord. The War Chiefs shall be selected from the eligible sons of the female families holding the head Lordship titles.

44. The lineal descent of the people of the Five Nations shall run in the female line. Women shall be considered the progenitors of the Nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of the mother.

51. When a Lord holds a conference in his home, his wife, if she wishes, may prepare the food for the Union Lords who assemble with him. This is an honorable right, which she may exercise, and an expression of her esteem.

Rulers must exhibit patience and good will to all:

24. The Lords of the Confederacy of the Five Nations shall be mentors of the people for all time. The thickness of their skin shall be seven spans -- which is to say that they shall be proof against anger, offensive actions and criticism. Their hearts shall be full of peace and good will and their minds filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the Confederacy. With endless patience they shall carry out their duty and their firmness shall be tempered with tenderness for their people. Neither anger nor fury shall find lodgement in their minds and all their words and actions shall be marked by calm deliberation.

Rulers must remind all of the Creator's Will:

26. It shall be the duty of all of the Five Nations Confederate Lords, from time to time as occasion demands, to act as mentors and spiritual guides of their people and remind them of their Creator's will and words. They shall say:" Hearken, that peace may continue unto future days! "Always listen to the words of the Great Creator, for he has spoken. "United people, let not evil find lodging in your minds. "For the Great Creator has spoken and the cause of Peace shall not become old. "The cause of peace shall not die if you remember the Great Creator." Every Confederate Lord shall speak words such as these to promote peace.

Honesty is necessary. Idle gossip is not permitted:

27. All Lords of the Five Nations Confederacy must be honest in all things. They must not idle or gossip, but be men possessing those honorable qualities that make true royaneh. It shall be a serious wrong for anyone to lead a Lord into trivial affairs, for the people must ever hold their Lords high in estimation out of respect to their honorable positions.

65. I, Dekanawidah, and the Union Lords, now uproot the tallest pine tree and into the cavity thereby made we cast all weapons of war. Into the depths of the earth, down into the deep underearth currents of water flowing to unknown regions we cast all the weapons of strife. We bury them from sight and we plant again the tree. Thus shall the Great Peace be established and the United People shall no longer know hostilities between the Five Nations but peace.

Property Rights.

73. The soil of the earth from one end of the land to the other is the property of the people who inhabit it. By birthright the Ongwehonneh (Original beings) are the owners of the soil, which they own and occupy and none other may hold it. The same law has been held from the oldest times. The Great Creator has made us of the one blood and of the same soil he made us and as only different tongues constitute different nations he established different hunting grounds and territories and made boundary lines between them.

Relations with outside nations, when war is necessary, treatment of enemies when war has been terminated.

75. When a member of an alien nation comes to the territory of the Five Nations and seeks refuge and permanent residence, the Lords of the Nation to which he comes shall extend hospitality and make him a member of the nation. Then shall he be accorded equal rights and privileges in all matters except as after mentioned.

80. When the Confederate Council of the Five Nations has for its object the establishment of the Great Peace among the people of an outside nation and that nation refuses to accept the Great Peace, then by such refusal they bring a declaration of war upon themselves from the Five Nations. Then shall the Five Nations seek to establish the Great Peace by a conquest of the rebellious nation.

81. When the men of the Five Nations, now called forth to become warriors, are ready for battle with an obstinate opposing nation that has refused to accept the Great Peace, then one of the five War Chiefs shall be chosen by the warriors of the Five Nations to lead the army into battle. It shall be the duty of the War Chief so chosen to come before his warriors and address them. His aim shall be to impress upon them the necessity of good behavior and strict obedience to all the commands of the War Chiefs. He shall deliver an oration exhorting them with great zeal to be brave and courageous and never to be guilty of cowardice.

83. When peace shall have been established by the termination of the war against a foreign nation, then the War Chief shall cause all the weapons of war to be taken from the nation. Then shall the Great Peace be established and that nation shall observe all the rules of the Great Peace for all time to come.

84. Whenever a foreign nation is conquered or has by their own will accepted the Great Peace their own system of internal government may continue, but they must cease all warfare against other nations.

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10. Role as Civilizing agent:

The Confederation or League of the five Iroquois tribes. Also, very possibly, much of the US Constitution was influenced by Dekanawidah's wisdom (see below).

ABOUT THE IROQUOIS CONSTITUTION:

by Gerald Murphy

“During the bi-centennial year of The Constitution of the United States, a number of books were written concerning the origin of that long-revered document. One of these, *The Genius of the People*, alleged that after the many weeks of debate a committee sat to combine the many agreements into one formal document. The chairman of the committee was John Rutledge of South Carolina. He had served in an earlier time, along with Ben Franklin and others, at the Stamp Act Congress, held in Albany, New York.

This Committee of Detail was having trouble deciding just how to formalize the many items of discussion into one document that would satisfy one and all. Rutledge proposed they model the new government they were forming into something along the lines of the Iroquois League of Nations, which had been functioning as a democratic government for hundreds of years, and which he had observed in Albany.

While there were many desirable, as well as undesirable, models from ancient and modern histories in Europe and what we know now as the Middle East, only the Iroquois had a system that seemed to meet most of the demands espoused by the many parties to the debates. *The Genius of the People* alleged that the Iroquois had a Constitution which began: "We the people, to form a union. . ."

That one sentence was enough to light a fire under me, and cause me to do some deep research into ancient Iroquoian lore. I never did find that one sentence backed up in what writings there are concerning the ancient Iroquois. But I DID find sufficient data and evidence to convince me that the Iroquois most certainly did have a considerable influence on the drafting of our own Constitution, and we present-day Americans owe them a very large debt.”

History is a challenge. Traditional history as taught in public schools can be very biased and incomplete. Yes, it is difficult to deal with the public at large who has learned to view the world and all its cultures and religions through the “tinted glasses” of Christian Orthodoxy. As this “majority” has a controlling input on who is hired and fired in the nation’s school systems and on what material shall be deemed “permissible” in the textbooks, the only result is a watered down non-offending-to-all version of knowledge. This kind of “filtered pablum” is not a healthy curriculum diet for either teacher or pupil.

Education, the pursuit of truth and a fair equitable history must be encouraged. All must be heard from in light of their own perspective- Natives and immigrants, slave and free, rich and poor- and, of course, ALL world Faiths need to be equitably represented and recognized for what they are; pathways to the knowledge and worship of the same God. Lets take off the blinders of parochialism and view humanity in a wider perspective. Let us give thanks and appreciation for the wonderful diversity about us.

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