The establishment of Schenectady had marked the beginning of white occupancy of the Mohawk Valley. In its long history the valley had served the Iroquois[1] well. The great highways of those days were not the roads and railroads, but the lakes, valley and rivers; and the Mohawk Valley was a perfect highway to the Great Lakes and the West, as well as to Canada north. Since the valley guarded the approach to the major waterways of the Continent, it also protected the back door of the European settlements on the Atlantic Coast. Both the Dutch and English in the New World were fully aware of this, and they courted the Iroquois. As a natural fortress, the valley also played a part in uniting the Iroquois tribes--the Senecas, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Mohawks into one nation called the "Iroquois Confederacy."[2]

The Mohawks, who were members of the Confederacy, were divided into three clans: Ochkari (The Bear);[3] Anaware (The Tortoise), and Oknaho (The Wolf). The Bear clan had their castle next to the Anaware and called their village "Banajiro," Kanagere or Canagere.[4] The Bear, Tortoise and Wolf clans

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1 The word "Iroquois" refers to all Indians who spoke variations of the Iroquois language--and there was no single Iroquois tribe according to Harvey Ardman, "The Rise and Fall of the Iroquois League," The American Legion Magazine, June 1973, p. 20.

2 Herkimer Co. Historical Society, p. 172.

3 Henry R. Schoolcraft, History of the Iroquois (Albany, 1847), p. 73. "We are all of the race of the bear, and a bear you know never yields while one drop of blood is left. . . . " remarked one Mohawk sachem (chief).

4 Rev. Thomas Grassmann, Mohawk Indians and Their Valley (Schen., 1969), p. 92.

were not allowed to marry within their own group, but had to marry into a clan different from their own. (A wolf or turtle male, for example, could not marry a wolf or turtle female.) This practice preserved the purity of blood and also strengthened the relationship between clans.[1]

Another practice which kept the ruling family dynasties broken up and provided the Mohawks with a more democratic way of life was the line of descent, which was reckoned from the female line. This meant a chief could not be succeeded by one of his male children, only by a descendant of the maternal line, a brother, for example. It was through this policy, no doubt, that the children of Alstock and Cornelis received Mohawk lands as an inheritance.[2]

Another way the Mohawks preserved their democracy was through the exercise of the gift of speech and the art of diplomacy. No political speech, today, for example, can compare in reasoning and pathos with the following which fell from the lips of Hendrick (Chief of the Mohawks of Cannejohary Castle), as he met with the English, who were seeking a Mohawk commitment against the French at Albany. He addressed the English Governor as:

"Brother Corlaer[3] and brothers of the other governments. Saturday last

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1 Schoolcraft, pp. 128-129.

2 Reid says Jacques Van Slyck received grants from the Indians as his right from his mother. (page 155).

3 The Iroquois called all the governors of New York (Manhattan) by the general name of "Corlaer," because of the great affection they held for Arendt Van Curler. (Herkimer Co. Hist. Society, p. 300.)

> you told us that you came here by order of the great king our common father, and in his name to renew the ancient chain of friendship between this and the other governments on the continent. . . . We rejoice that by the king's orders, we are all met here this day, and are glad to see each other face to face; we are very thankful for the same. . . . You have asked us the reason of our living in this divided manner; the reason is, your neglecting us these 3 years past. [Hendrick takes a stick and throws it behind his back.] You have thrown us behind your backs and disregarded us; whereas the French are subtle and vigilant people, ever using their utmost endeavors to seduce and bring our people over to them. . . . Brethren, the governor of Virginia and the governor of Canada are both quarelling about lands which belong to us, and such a quarrel as this may end in our destruction. . . . It is very true, as you told us, that the clouds hang heavy over us, and it is not very pleasant to look up, but we give you this belt to clear away all clouds, that we may all live in bright sunshine.[1]

The spoken word was strenuously and successfully cultivated by the Iroquois, and they gloried in its power to sway people. For their leaders, it was a means of educating the people, when books and letters were absent, and also a way to teach them to appreciate their rights and principles of government, which were highly democratic. One historian went so far as to call the Iroquois, because of their political wisdom and self-governing ability, the "Romans of the New World."[2]

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1 Simms, pp. 126, 127.

2 Ardman quoting Francis Parkman, p. 20.

The eloquence of the Iroquois language is again illustrated by Hendrick on the same day. Speaking for the Mohawks he refers to Colonel William Johnson,[1] and then addresses the Governor:

> Brother, We had a message some time since to meet you at this place when the fire burns; we of Cannejohary, met the messenger you sent with a letter at Col. Johnson's: and as soon as we received it we came running down, and the Six Nations are now here complete.

To this Governor Clinton of New York replied:

> Brethren of the six nations you are welcome. I take this opportunity now you are all together to condole the loss in the death of your friends and relations since you last met here: and with this string of wampum I wipe away your tears, and take sorrow from your hearts, that you may open your minds and speak freely.[2]

Hendrick thanks the Governor for "condoling our loss; for wiping away our tears. . . . " and then explains why the Cannejohary Mohawks had stayed away so long: " . . . because we were neglected and when you neglect business the French take advantage of it; for they are never quiet." To the English earlier he had said: "Look about you, and see all these houses full of beaver, and the money is all gone to Canada; likewise your powder, lead, and guns, which the French make use of at the Ohio. . . . look at the French, they are men; they are fortifying everywhere; but we are ashamed to say it; you are like women, bare and open, without any fortifications."[3]

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[1] Johnson had a large estate in the Mohawk Valley and a Mohawk wife. As Superintendent of Indian Affairs, he exerted much influence on the Mohawks.

[2] Simms, pp. 128-129.

[3] Simms, p. 128.

The Iroquois language suffered, of course, from translation into Dutch then back into English; but it still maintained its great command and its dignity. The original language was manly, and the deep, loud sounds which rolled from the tongue were mostly made with the lips open. There were no labials, such as "b," "p," and "m," because these sounds were made by closing or nearly closing the lips. Each of the Five Nations had a dialect. For example, the word "eye," in the Mohawk dialect was "Okara," in Oneida "Ogah," "Ogahah" in Onondage, "Okagha" in Cayuga, and "Ogah" in Seneca.[1]

In addition to the language which the Iroquois held in common, they also shared a religion, whose priesthood exerted a uniting influence, and shared civil laws which also helped to bind them together as a nation. After the Dutch put firearms in their hands, they became the best warriors on the North American continent.[2] The surrounding Indian nations simply could not withstand the confederation of the Iroquois, and they were easily defeated.[3]

Interestingly enough the word "Mohawk" is not derived from the Iroquois language, but stems from a name coined by the Algonquins of Canada, "Mahaqua." The Jesuit priest Brebeuf called them "the people of the flint" or Mahakobaas (Mahakuaas), which was shortened by the Dutch to Maquaas and later by

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1 Schoolcraft, pp. 50-51.

2 Schoolcraft, pp. 45, 137.

3 Schoolcraft, p. 52.

the English, since there were no labials in their language, to "Mohawk."[1]

The physical description of the Mohawk people was given by Megapolensis in an account he wrote in 1644. He described them as being similar in body and stature to Dutchmen, with some having "well-formed features, bodies and limbs . . . black hair and eyes." The women, he said, "let their hair grow very long, and tie it together a little and let it hang down their backs."[2]

The religious system of the Mohawks had been challenged by both the French and the Dutch. The story of the resistance to Christianity by Alstock points out how deeply rooted her own religious system was and how reluctant she was to accept another. The French, especially, were zealous in their religious endeavors. However, they were equally concerned with helping to improve the lot of the natives. The Catholic Jesuits,[3] for example, opposed dancing and the sale of liquor; and they attempted to understand the traits of the natives. They realized that for the natives to accept Christianity, they must deny the very fears by which they lived, since superstition governed many of their impulses. The French, in general, had a very different attitude toward the natives than the English. They accepted the Indian for what he was and in some cases came to "live his life, to intermarry." The Anglo-Saxon, on the other hand, was too race conscious feeling little

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[1] Reid, p. 5.

[2] Grassmann, p. 90.

[3] The Jesuits were powerful in Canada (New France) and held that any conflict between church and state would result in submission of the state to the church. They refused to divide authority and drove many of the civil authorities from the colony. (See p. 91 of Herkimer Historical Society.)

of the French concern to bring the Indian to Christianity; but he and his American successor felt if they took an Indian woman, they were raising her to their level by marrying her. The Frenchman, on the other hand, found he could live with the Indian in the woods as an equal, could marry as an Indian, or even by Christian rites, where possible.[1]

The French were not only interested in religious endeavors, but also concerned in building up their colonies in the New World. To promote colonization in Canada, they passed a law requiring young men at 20 to marry, or else forfeit fishing, hunting and trading rights. This law against bachelors drove young men who wanted to remain single into the woods. Many launched their canoes and paddled far into the forested wilderness. Though these rovers called "Coureur de bois," (koo. RUR deh BWAH), were outlawed, 800 out of a 10,000-Canadian population was living in the forests.[2]

Like Jim Bridger and his mountain men of the West, the Coureur de bois loved the wilderness and liked trading and trapping for fur with the natives. They held trading and social gatherings which afforded feasting and a chance for a little flirting in Indian as well as remote French villages. Jacques Hartell

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1 Edmonds, pp. 4, 145. In all probability Cornelis Van Slyck and Alstock Hartell were married by an Indian ceremony, rather than a Christian rite, since Alstock was so opposed to the new religion.

2 Herkimer Co. Historical Society, pp. 96, 97.

(pronounced ZHAHK)[1] may have been one of these young men who wandered into the wilderness. Possibly at one of these combination trading-social gatherings, he met the compelling Indian Princess, who was to become his wife.

The Dutch like the French-Canadians were interested in colonization, but mostly for the advantages of trade and commerce which it afforded. When the English sailed into the port of Manhattan in 1664, therefore, intending to take possession, they did not know whether or not the Dutch would resist forcibly or not. They were relying chiefly on the independent spirit the Dutch manifested from the Old World government in Holland. (The Dutch in the New World felt they had too long been neglected.) When they offered to give the New Netherland colonists commercial and religious liberty, the settlers convinced their wooden-legged governor, Pietier Stuyvesant, to surrender the colony to the English without a fight. The English Colonel, Richard Nicolls, proceeded to land on Dutch soil, marching three of his companies overland toward the little village of Breuckelen (a transplanted name from Holland, the birthplace of Cornelis Van Slyck, which was later anglicized to "Brooklyn"); and Governor Stuyvesant went to meet him surrendering the colony to the English. This surrender brought to an end 17 years of rule by the wooden-legged governor.[2]

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[1] Hall designates Hartell as a "trader."

[2] Edmonds, p. 151. Stuyvesant replaced William Kieft, who was removed for incompetence.

Two years prior to the Dutch surrender, Stuyvesant had granted to Jacques Van Slyck a patent for an island in the Mohawk that afterwards bore the family name. At Schenectady the Mohawk River on the south side had meandered in tangled loops all over the flat lands forming islands of which Van Slyck's was the largest. Later as Schenectady grew, it expanded to include this island; and at the foot of Washington Avenue on the eastern point of the island under a willow tree, Jacque's mother, Alstock, is said to be buried.[1]

After the Dutch surrender, the English true to their promise granted commercial and religious liberty to the colony. Richard Nicholls, the English Colonel, who had taken possession of New Netherland, was appointed the new governor. He made no attempt to make English the first language or the Church of England supreme (The English church existed side by side and often shared the same buildings with the Dutch Reformed Church); and trading flourished. Nicholls, however, in 1665, fearful of a French invasion from the north, sailed up the Hudson, removed the Dutch commander at Ft. Orange and renewed the good relations the Dutch had maintained with the Mohawks.[2]

In the spring of that same year, he sent Cornelis Van Slyck to take possession of the Five Nations "as they were delivered to ye English by ye Dutch govr Petrus Stuyvesant."[3] By renewing the good relations with the

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[1] Hall, p. 73. The island was given first to Alstock and Cornelis as a wedding gift from the Mohawks. Jacques, according to Reid, was granted half the island in 1662.

[2] Edmonds, pp. 326-327.

[3] Livingston, p. 146.

Mohawks, Nicholls paved the way for protecting Albany by treaty. Each year previous the Mohawks had come into Ft. Orange to renew their friendship with the peaceful Dutch, and now under the English this relationship was to continue.[1]

As a result of this friendship with the Mohawks, the fur trading business had flourished. Arendt Van Curler realized that much of this trade could be intercepted from the West India Company at Ft. Orange to his Uncle, the Patroon, if a post were established above the Lower Mohawk Falls. He had, therefore, with bold Dutch pluckiness and the help of the Van Slycks, established Schenectady.[2]

Jacques at an early date had built an inn, located at the corner of present day Washington and Cucumber Alley in Schenectady, where he had been licensed prior to 1670 to provide a line of liquor for the public. The inns and taverns in those days were important in any settlement and usually the innkeepers were men of repute and standing. Jacques' inn, however, was not only used to sell food and liquor, but served as a convenient place to carry on trading for furs and pelts, even though this was illegal. (One writer states that because Jacques was of Indian extraction, he stood in great favor among the red men as well as the white.)[3] A bickering and dispute

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1 Edmonds, pp. 326-7. The friendship treaty between the Mohawks and the Dutch (later the English) would last over 100 years.

2 The West India Co., aware of possible competition, made one provision for settling Schenectady by Van Curler a hands-off policy as far as fur trading was concerned--that privilege being reserved for the company alone.

3 Monroe also comments that through the marriage of Jacques and his sisters into members of some of the best Dutch families in Chenectedi, there was an infusion of Mohawk blood in many generations to follow. (pp. 39, 59.)

arose when another man, Cornelise Viele, applied for a license for another inn in Schenectady maintaining "he wanted to conduct a better place than that kept by Van Slyck." The matter was settled in 1672, by the Governor who had replaced Richard Nicholls, Francis Lovelace, when he gave Arendt Van Curler's widow the exclusive license in town.[1]

By 1690, Schenectady, where Jacques had made his home, had grown into a town of 200 inhabitants and some 40 homes; but events in Europe were to bring it crashing down. A Protestant English princess (Mary) and her Dutch husband (William) had been called from Holland on a wave of anti-Catholic sentiment to rule England. Angered at the turn of events, the Catholic King of France sent troops across the Atlantic to strike at English possessions. In the meantime, because William and Mary had not as yet appointed a governor in America, a German, Jacob Leisler, had set himself up as temporary ruler at Manhattan.[2]

With a French attack from the north apparent, Leisler offered troops for the protection of Albany to the Patroon's officials there, who refused help; and because Schenectady, from the first, was under the thumb of Albany and its officials, this village was left unprotected and at the mercy of a few indifferent Connecticut soldiers on a Sunday morning in Feb., 1690.

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1 Monroe, p. 59. (Her husband had been drowned when his canoe capsized on a peace mission to Canada.) Jacques' first child, Harman, was born about 1664 in Schenectady. His marriage to Grietje Ryckman produced nine children, the last of whom (Lidia) married Isaac Van Valkenburg, son of Jocheim Lambertse Van Valkenburg and Eva Hendrickse Vrooman Van Valkenburg. (See Hall, p. 84.)

2 Hislop, pp. 82-83.

After the attack by 210 Frenchmen and their Indian allies, only four or five homes remained out of Schenectady's 40, the rest were burned to the ground. Men and boys were taken prisoner to Canada; many hid in the woods. Sixty of the settlers would never leave for anywhere--they were dead. All that day refugees from Schenectady, frost-bitten, many with their arms and legs frozen, trickled into Albany.[1]

Jacques may have been away from Schenectady at the time of the massacre. One writer indicates he died in 1690 and that his will was made out May 8, 1690, three months after the burning. His wife, Grietje, did not remarry until a year after the incident. Like his father, Cornelis, Jacques was an interpreter and may have been away on assignment to the Five Nations, when the village was attacked. Jacques had been exposed to the various Iroquois dialects growing up in Canajoharie Castle and, of course, had learned the Dutch language from Cornelis, so he was well qualified to follow in the footsteps of his father, who has been called "the great Indian interpreter."[2] In his capacity as interpreter, Jacques was referred to variously as "Jacques Cornelis," "Jacques Cornelissen," "Akus Cornelissen," "Aukes Van Slyck" and "Ackes."[3] He was called by the Indian name of "ITSYCHOQUACHKA."[4]

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1 See Chapter 8 of Hislop and p. 58 of Reid for a more detailed account. Adam Vrooman's child was thrown against the wall, and his "wife lay dead at her husband's feet." Vrooman escaped, however, and later married Jacques' wife, Grietje. Adam's father and his brother along with two Negro slaves were killed and his own sons carried off to Canada as prisoners. (Reid in his account refers to Adam's father as Hendrick Meese, Hall spells his name Bartholomeus.)

2 Monroe, p. 25.

3 Grassmann, p. 315.

4 Pearson, p. 239.