

**STRENGTH**  
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Wa'tkwanonhwerá:ton,

I am writing this letter regarding the City on Montréal's decision to change the name of one of its streets. Indeed Amherst Street will soon be renamed by the City and it is the position of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke that the street should be renamed with the area's indigenous history in mind.

It is our hope that we will be able to present the City of Montreal with a selection of possible names, as a consensus of Mohawk communities. Should Kahnawà:ke, Kanesatake and Akwesasne agree on our choices together, the effect on the city would be more substantial and influential.

We would like to submit a list of three possible name changes, all of which are names of historic indigenous people of note. Four of the individuals we believe to be worthy of this honor, are Kontiaronk who was instrumental in creating peace between the Nations in 1701; Deskaheh, who was critical in the fight for the Five Nations sovereign rights; Onasakenrah of Kanesatake, a warrior of great ability, and Saint Kateri Tekakwitha of Kahnawà:ke who was the first Native American to be recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church.

Attached you will find further information on all four of our selections and a proposed recommendation for the name change. It is our belief that all four of these historic figures are worthy of honor, we hope that you will agree as well. Eventually all of these suggested names will be of importance for the City of Montreal.

Please submit your own community's letter to the City of Montreal with your own selection.

In Peace and Friendship,

**ON BEHALF OF THE OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL OF CHIEFS**  
**MOHAWK COUNCIL OF KAHNAWÀ:KE**

  
Grand Chief Joseph Tokwiwo Norton

Jtn/czd/07202018/

CC: Chief and Council  
File

## **PROPOSALS FOR A NAME CHANGE TO AMHERST STREET**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The City of Montreal, as part of its reconciliation strategy with First Nations to recognize the historical contribution of Indigenous peoples to its own history, is considering a name change to Amherst Street in Montreal in favor of a native person who has played a significant role in Canadian history.

Four Indigenous names are currently under consideration for the Amherst Street name change: Kondiaronk, a Petun Huron Chief of the Upper Lake tribes (1649-1701), Deskaheh, a Cayuga Chief of the Six Nations Reserve on the Grand River (1873-1925), Onasakenrat, a Mohawk Chief from Kanehsatake (1845-1881) and Kateri Tekakwitha, a Mohawk woman, the first Native American to be recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church (1656-1680). Information on Kondiaronk, Deskaheh, Onasakenrat and Kateri Tekakwitha is provided below and a discussion as to which of the three names should be proposed to City of Montreal for the name change of Amherst Street concludes the Memo.

### **KONDIARONK**

Kondiaronk was a Tionontati or Petun Huron Chief at Michilimackimac. He was born around 1649 and died on August 2, 1701 in Montreal in peace negotiations between the tribes of the Upper Lakes and the Iroquois. He was known by the French as “Le Rat” and considered one of the most civilized and considerable person of the Upper Nations.

Born in 1649, Kondiaronk lived in a time when war with the Five Nations had continued unabated for 100 years. He witnessed firsthand the dispersion of his people and the introduction of European diseases. He rose up as a leader of the Petun Huron and established numerous alliances with dozens of native tribes.

With the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 ending the conflict in Europe, New York and New France agreed to suspend hostilities. For the Five Nations, the withdrawal of active English support, combined with the depredations of this long war, prompted the Iroquois Confederacy to make peace overtures to Frontenac, Governor of France.

Kondiaronk took advantage of this geopolitical context and as an ally of the French saw an opportunity to militate for a permanent peace with all neighboring Nations. Negotiations went on for a few years and led to the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701 finally ending the conflict that had lasted for over 100 years.

On his way to Montreal, Kondiaronk and his delegation arrived in Kahnawake where they were properly greeted at the water's edge by a small-fire. They were then led by the arm to the main council lodge where they smoked for a quarter of an hour with great composure. Next they were greeted with the "three rare words" of the ritual of requickening – wiping of tears, clearing the ears, and opening the throat – to prepare them to speak of peace the next day with Onontio (French Governor General) in Montreal.

The protocol of forest diplomacy demanded the use of metaphor, timing, manipulation of space, and reciprocal action by both parties. The kettle, the hatchet, the road, the fire, the mat, the sun, and the Tree of Peace were each subject to qualifiers appropriate to the mood or intent. Leading or receiving a procession at the woods-edge, taking guests by the arm to the main fire, arranging the council grounds, seating delegates, allowing them to withdraw to consider and to return to reply, were part of the spatial arrangements. Wiping away tears, exchanging speeches and songs, passing the pipe, throwing wampum belts, returning prisoners, distributing presents, and apportioning the feast were expected of both hosts and guests. All of this belonged to a ritual widely shared in the lower lakes by Iroquoians and Algonkians alike, and surviving as a fragment in the Iroquois Condolence Council.

The following day the Iroquois shot the rapids to the main fire at Montreal, where they were greeted by the crash of artillery. The smoke of their feasting had scarcely disappeared when in their wake came 200 canoes of the French allies Nations – Chippewas, Ottawas, Potawatomis, Hurons, Miamis, Winnebagos, Menominees, Sauks, Foxes, and Mascoutens – over 700 Indians to be received ceremoniously at the landing. The Far Indians performed their specialty, the Calumet Dance, to the accompaniment of

gourd rattles, making friends of their hosts. By July 25 negotiations between the tribes were fully under way.

Kondiaronk came so ill to a council held August 1 to discuss the matter that he could not stand. Yet everyone was glad when he spoke: "He sat down first on a folding stool; then a large and comfortable armchair was brought for him so that he could speak with greater ease; he was given some wine to strengthen him but he asked for a herbal drink and it was realized that he wanted syrup of maiden-hair fern," a sovereign Iroquois remedy. Having recovered somewhat, he spoke in a languid tone while the assembly listened intently for nearly two hours, occasionally voicing its approval of his points. Though he was obviously chagrined at the conduct of the Iroquois, his political skill made him take a new tack, and he reviewed at length his own diplomatic role in averting attacks on the Iroquois, in persuading reluctant tribal delegations to come to Montreal, and in recovering prisoners. "We could not help but be touched," wrote La Potherie, "by the eloquence with which he expressed himself, and could not fail to recognize at the same time that he was a man of worth." After speaking, Kondiaronk felt too weak to return to his hut and was carried in the armchair to the hospital, where his illness steadily worsened. He died at two A.M. No trace of Kondiaronk's grave remains as he lies somewhere at the edge of Place d'Armes near the Basilica.

## **DESKAHEH**

Deskaheh was a farmer, a Cayuga chief, and a true believer that the Five Nations were sovereign and should legally be recognized as such in accordance with various wampum and Treaties signed with the British Crown. He was born on March 15, 1873 on the Six Nations Reserve on the Grand River, Ontario, the son of William General and Lydia Burnham. He married around 1898 Mary Bergen with whom he had four daughters and five sons. He died on June 27 1925 on the Tuscarora Reservation in New York State.

The Six Nations community contained two distinct religious worlds: that of the Mohawk, Oneida, Tuscarora, and Iroquois allies such as the Delaware, who accepted Protestant Christianity, and that of the Seneca and Onondaga, who adhered to the teachings of Skanyátari.io (Handsome Lake), who had reformed the Iroquois religion in the early 19th century. The Cayuga included both Christian and Longhouse adherents. A

descendant of an Oneida mother and a Cayuga father, Deskaheh remained an adherent of the traditional Longhouse religion.

Generally the Christian Iroquois promoted social adjustment through the adoption of commercial agriculture and education in English while the Longhouse people championed the old ways, including hereditary chiefs, autonomy, and resistance to the Indian Act. Roughly a quarter of the reserve in 1890 identified with the Longhouse faith. The Confederacy Council of some 75 chiefs became the only institution where members of the two traditions met regularly.

In 1917, Louise Miller, the matron of the Young Bear clan of the Cayuga, installed Deskaheh as its new hereditary chief on the Confederacy Council. A powerful orator, he would advance quickly: deputy speaker of council in 1918 and speaker in 1922. Deskaheh pressured the government to review the Six Nations' historical status, specifically their right to recognition as allies, not subjects, of the British crown, and hence to immunity from federal control. When council's Canadian lawyers failed to obtain Ottawa's agreement to such a review, Deskaheh decided to take the matter to England in 1921 where he learned that the Colonial Office considered the Six Nations to be British subjects, a decision later reinforced by Ontario's courts.

In 1923, Deskaheh and G. P. Decker went again to London in August en route to Geneva. They lobbied for international recognition of the Six Nations as an independent state, under article 17 of the International League of Nations' covenant. Despite his efforts and some willingness by certain countries to discuss the issue, British objections to a review of what it regarded as a domestic Canadian matter were decisive.

Deskaheh returned to North America in early 1925 in poor health. He then moved to stay with his friend Chief Clinton Rickard on the Tuscarora Reservation in western New York, where he died. He was buried in the Upper Cayuga Longhouse cemetery at Six Nations.

Deskaheh's trip to the League of Nations in 1923-24 marks the first attempt by North American First Nations to take their claims for sovereignty to an international forum. His understanding that the Five Nations Iroquois were first and foremost allies and not subjects of the British Crown is a question which continues to be debated today.

## **ONASAKENRAT**

Joseph Onasakenrat (Onesakenarat, also known as Sosé, Joseph Akwirente, Chief Joseph, and Le Cygne) was the son of Lazare Akwirente and a Mohawk Iroquois chief and Methodist missionary born on September 4, 1845 in Kanehsatake on the seigneurie of Lac-des-Deux-Montagnes. Chief Joseph died on February 7, 1881 on these same lands, which, at the time of his death were now known as Oka.

In April 1718, King Louis XV granted the Sulpicians a seigneurie at Lac des Deux-Montagnes, where they could move and settle the mission previously located at the Fort de la Montagne and at Sault-au-Récollet to settle there with the Algonkian and Iroquoian converts in their care.

Over the years, ownership of the land at Lac des Deux-Montagnes was to become a source of conflict between the priests and the natives which continue to be debated up to this day. Indeed, ever since the British conquest, the Mohawks Iroquois publicly protested the Sulpicians' claim to ownership of the seigneurie.

By the year 1860, the Sulpicians, badly in need of a native spokesman sympathetic to their cause, saw in Joseph Onasakenrat a future leader. A gifted pupil, he was sent at age 15 to the Sulpicians' Petit Séminaire de Montréal'. He studied for three years at the college (where Louis Riel was a classmate) and then returned to the Mission to become secretary to the Sulpicians under Antoine Mercier. On July 25, 1868 the Iroquois elected Onasakenrat, then only 22 years old, their principal chief. To the surprise of the Sulpicians, he quickly showed his independence from them by drafting a petition to the governor general of the newly formed country of Canada protesting against the society's control of the settlement. The Indians, he pointed out, could not secure title to their lands from the priests or even cut firewood without their permission.

On February 18, 1869, without first seeking the priests' permission, he cut down a huge elm tree, thereby challenging their privilege of granting wood-cutting rights. On February 26, he marched with 40 of his band to the Sulpicians' residence and there, in blunt, forceful manner warned them to leave Oka in eight days or their lives would be in danger.

The priests quickly obtained a warrant for Joseph's arrest. On March 4, he and his two fellow chiefs were seized by Montreal police, but within weeks Joseph was out of jail and again leading the struggle. In late December 1869 he forwarded another petition to the governor general in which he summarized the Mohawk Iroquois complaint: "From what our fathers have told us we always believed as they believed, that these lands were given in the first instance by the King of France to the Seminary for our use and interest; now however we are told that the lands belong to the Seminary, and that we live on them and use them only because they permit us to do so." The federal government refused to accept the Oka Indians' claim to ownership of the seigneurie and affirmed the Sulpicians' claim to sole legal title as confirmed by the 1840 Union Act.

Throughout the 1870s the strife continued at Oka. The police, summoned by the priests, frequently arrested Mohawks for cutting wood in the forests and for tearing down fences erected by the Sulpicians. In December 1875, the Sulpicians dismantled the Methodist church in the Indian village, claiming that the Mohawks had no legal right to erect it. Then on 15 June 1877, the Sulpicians' church itself mysteriously burnt down. The priests accused a number of Iroquois, who in turn claimed that they had arrived only after the fire had begun. Warrants were issued for the arrest of Chief Joseph and his father (both seen by a Sulpician at the scene of the fire), as well as a dozen others. All were accused of arson. Wealthy English-speaking Protestants in Montreal came forward to help the accused, providing bail and legal aid. The case was finally dismissed in 1881 after four juries failed to reach a verdict.

Upon his release on bail Joseph returned to Oka where he acted as interpreter for the resident Methodist missionary. He began translating the Bible in Kanienke'ha and by June 1880, he had translated the four Gospels from French into Iroquois. In 1880, he was himself ordained a minister by the Montreal Conference of the Methodist Church of Canada and assigned as a missionary to the Iroquois settlements at Caughnawaga (Kahnawake) and Saint-Régis (Akwesasne). His ministry proved a short one, however, as he died suddenly at Oka on February 7, 1881 at age 35.

In the last year of his life Joseph had reversed his stand against the Sulpicians and had begun advocating a peaceful solution to the conflict. But in advocating moderation, Joseph lost the support of his people, who would follow his counsel only as long as he championed what they felt were their basic rights. Six months after his death the majority of the Oka Iroquois dramatically voted against his "peace policy." In the fall of

1881, when the time came to move to the lands in the Muskoka region of Ontario purchased for them by the Sulpicians, only one-fifth of the Iroquois consented to move.

The "Oka Question" continued unresolved for 30 years after Joseph Onasakenrat's death, before the Supreme Court of Canada finally upheld the Sulpicians' title in 1910. However, as the 1990 Oka crisis demonstrated, the issue of Mohawk title to the lands of the Lake of Two-Mountains Seignury is still a debated question and negotiations are still continuing with the government of Canada to achieve a resolution to one of the oldest land title dispute in Canada.

Joseph Onasakenrat was buried at the 'Cote-des-Neiges' cemetery in Montreal.

## **KATERI TEKATWITHA**

Kateri Tekakwitha is the first Mohawk to be named venerable by the Roman Catholic Church. She was born in Ossernenon (Auriesville) in the State of New York in 1656 and died in Kahnawake in 1680 at the early age of 24. Kateri Tekakwitha's mother, a Christian Algonquian woman, had been captured from Trois-Rivieres around 1653. Shortly afterwards she had been chosen by a Mohawk to be his wife but in 1660 she was carried off by smallpox, along with her husband and her last-born child. Young Catherine, whose face was pock-marked and whose eyes were badly affected, almost died too. She was taken in by her uncle, the first chieftain of the village.

In the autumn of 1666 Prouville de Tracy came down from Quebec at the head of a punitive expedition and burned villages in Mohawk River Valley. One of the burned villages, Ossernenon was rebuilt under the name of Gandaouagué, on the other side of the Mohawk River, a little to the west of the former site.

In September 1667, The Jesuits sent Fathers Jacques Frémin, Jacques Bruyas\*, Jean Pierron, along with Charles Boquet and François Poisson to Gandaouagué. During the three days that they stayed there, Kateri Tekakwitha had to take care of the Jesuits, whose piety and courteous manners impressed her.

In 1675 Father Jacques de Lamberville\*, a Jesuit, entered her lodge for the first time. She revealed to him her desire to receive baptism. The ceremony took place on Easter

Day, 1676, and the young Indian girl received the name of Kateri. Her conversion brought upon her a veritable persecution and she was even threatened with death. Amidst all these trials Father Lamberville advised her to pray unremittingly and to go live at the Saint-Louis (Lachine) rapids which she did in 1677.

It was at the Saint-François-Xavier mission that Kateri Tekakwitha definitely prepared herself for the Christian life. Anastasie Tegonhatsiongo, who had formerly been her mother's friend at Ossernenon, acted as her spiritual guide. Because of her exceptional qualities she was allowed to take her first communion and was received into the Confrérie de la Sainte-Famille in 1678 despite her youth.

The strength of Kateri Tekakwitha's spirituality lay in an extraordinary purity of body and soul and an efficacious charity towards all. She lived in full the life of the Indians, in the village as on the great winter hunts. Not until 1678, less than two years before her death, did she cease to accompany her people in their search for game as she wished to be closer to the church. She was permitted to take in private the vow of perpetual chastity. It is easy to understand why posterity named her the Lily of the Mohawks.

In 1680, she became seriously ill. During the Catholic Holy Week, at barely 24 years of age, she passed away while uttering the names of Jesus and Mary.

After her death Father Cholenec\* observed that Kateri's features, which had been marked by smallpox, had become remarkably beautiful. In consequence of conspicuous favors obtained through her intercession, there soon sprang up a strong devotion to her.

In 1744 Father Charlevoix\* wrote she was "universally regarded as the Protectress of Canada." Devotion to the Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha has spread to Canada, the United States, and throughout the world. Each year sees more pilgrimages made to Auriesville and to the Saint-François-Xavier mission at Kahnawake where her relics are preserved.

She was canonized and became an official saint of the Roman Catholic Church on October 21, 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI. Since her death about 50 biographies of the Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha have appeared in some 10 languages.

## **DISCUSSION**

Kondiaronk, Deskaheh, Onasakenrat and Kateri Tekatwitha were all great Indigenous persons who all left indelible mark on history. They helped fashioned the development of relationships within First Nations each in their own right and in their own times. Kondiaronk was instrumental in ending the longest war in history among First Nations; Deskaheh believed in the sovereign rights of his people enough to take the issue up to international forums, something First Nations continue to do to this day to ensure that they are properly heard and that their rights are recognized; Joseph Onasakenrat embodies the struggle that continue to this day to have the lands of the Seigneury of Lake of Two-Mountains be recognized as Mohawk lands and Kateri Tekatwitha conversion to the Christian faith was so impressive that millions of Catholic Christians revere her to this day. So, each of these people has marked their times and deserve that their memory be preserved and that city streets bear their names.

However, in the current context of searching for a new name to Amherst Street, it is proposed that the name be that of Kateri Tekatwitha. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that there is no street yet named after her in Montreal. As a historic Catholic City, one would expect this to already be an established fact. As for Kondiaronk and Deskaheh, other opportunities will likely occur in the future to recognize them as well.

(Most of the above information can be retraced to the Dictionary of Canadian biography:  
<http://www.biographi.ca/en/> )

