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NEW YORK FOLKLORE  
129 Jay Street  
Schenectady, NY 12305  
518/346-7008  
Fax 518/346-6617  
Email: [info@nyfolklore.org](mailto:info@nyfolklore.org)  
<http://www.nyfolklore.org>

# Haudenosaunee Days of Sharing at Explore & More Children's Museum in Buffalo, New York

BY CHRISTINE F. ZINNI

Faced with the looming crisis of climate change, scientists are turning to the wisdom of indigenous people to enhance their understanding of biodiversity and stewardship of the environment. Beyond just gaining an understanding as a Western scientific project, folklorists and educators, whose work has brought them into contact with bearers of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)<sup>1</sup> in the “ethnosphere” or “constellation of world’s cultures,” know there is much to learn from non-Western modes of perception and epistemologies of knowledge, as reflected in the artwork, oral tradition, and stories of indigenous peoples.

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy of Western and Central New York and Canada consists of Six Nations: Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Mohawk, and Tuscarora, brought together centuries ago through the efforts of a man called the Peacemaker. Known as the *People of the Longhouse*, the Haudenosaunee people are playing a contemporary leadership role in not only designing successful arts and cultural organizations of their own, but also engaging a variety of museum directors, curators, and educators through their art, music, dance, and storytelling performances—as well as collaborative efforts, which are helping to

shape the direction of educational programming in a region known for its waterways, lush forests, animal life, and the rich cultural, political, and ecological legacy of their people.

The first in a three-part series, this article features interviews with and profiles of Haudenosaunee artists involved in New York State Folk Arts programs at Explore & More Children’s Museum (E&M 2018) in Buffalo, New York—the city chosen as the site of the 2018 American Folklore Conference, entitled “No Illusions, No Exclusions.” In the spirit of “common ground,” this article offers these Native



Recent progress on construction of Explore & More Museum, Canalside. Photo courtesy of the Museum.



Marian Miller (Seneca, Turtle Clan), 1987. Photo courtesy of Marky Davidson (Seneca, Turtle Clan).

American perspectives, as well as that of the Senior Manager of Learning and Education at Explore & More, and myself, a New York folklorist, who has worked with the museum on Haudenosaunee Days of Sharing for over a decade. My focus on the long view and detailing the process of engagement, outreach, and practice of collaborative work from 2009 to the present is intended to shed light on the diversity, strength, and vitality of Haudenosaunee artistic communities in the region and what representation in museum programs might look like, while posing questions about the future. In this regard, the article also points to efforts currently underway by Explore & More to deepen connections, develop partnerships, and design programs, installations, and exhibits that spark empathy and create awareness of Haudenosaunee worldviews and environmental issues. As Falk and Juan (2016) wrote in their article, “Native Eyes:

The Power of Coming Together,” documenting the collaborative efforts between the Arizona State Museum and the Tohono O’odham Nation to call attention to indigenous knowledge and the shared resource of water: “Museums need to acknowledge the expertise of their community partners. All partners need to practice respect for what each brings to the table. This should be the norm as the result can be powerful, meaningful programs that honor cultural knowledge and link unique communities together.”<sup>22</sup>

As points of comparison, subsequent articles in the series intend to offer yet another perspective on TEK by featuring *Native-run art centers* like Ganondagan’s Seneca Art & Culture Center (Ganondagan 2017) in Rochester, New York. The historic site of the largest Seneca village in the area, Ganondagan has grown, over the past 20 years, from being a designated historic site with an interpretative center, recreated bark longhouse, and walking trails, to including a major art and cultural center. Moreover, it has forged alliances with the Rochester Museum & Science Center (RMSC 2018) and Memorial Art Gallery, several local colleges, and the Environmental Field Team (EFT), whose mission is focused on preserving, restoring, and enhancing natural resources.

The third article will look at yet another facet of TEK in the region by highlighting the efforts of indigenous activists and community scholars, who have created programs beyond museum walls in centers of higher learning, common spaces, and along waterfronts. Calling attention to traditional Haudenosaunee teachings and sensitive environmental issues, plants, waters, and water quality, they stress how stewardship of natural resources ultimately connected to peace and justice issues, underscored in *the Great Law of the Peacemaker*.

Through these different lens, the articles will serve not only as a record of local efforts and collaborations involving the TEK of Haudenosaunee, but as a prelude to discussions, one that will take place on October 18, 2018, at a forum revolving around TEK in museums and art centers, co-moderated

by Lisa Rathje, PhD, executive director of Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education, and myself, at the American Folklore Society’s (AFS) Conference in Buffalo. A number of the artists featured in this article will be participating in the forum. In this way, both the articles and forum seek to fulfill the promise of Common Ground, by providing a virtual as well as physical commons, in which the sharing of ideas might act as a platform for educators to think about the place-based knowledge of indigenous people in their own regions and possible ways the knowledge can be incorporated into the educators’ own organizational programs and school curricula.

On yet another level, by taking up issues related to decolonizing museum education and affirming how indigenous epistemologies are foundational to outreach curriculum, the articles and forum demonstrate some of the ways in which the theme of this year’s AFS 2018 Conference in Buffalo, “No Illusions and No Exclusions,” is altogether appropriate and pertinent to today’s world, our work in the field, and what’s more, the continued health of the natural world.

## Coming to Explore & More

Set to open in a new \$24 million building along Buffalo’s waterfront, Explore & More Museum (E&M) is very much a part of the city’s efforts to revitalize and showcase the region’s natural resources along the shore of Lake Erie. Starting out as a collective of women in less than 2,000 square feet of the lower level of a repurposed school building in the southern tier of Erie Country, Explore & More is now poised to reach tens of thousands of visitors from childhood and up, as well as school systems in the region. Stressing the direction of the museum and the commitment of its administration to working with members of the Haudenosaunee community on exhibits and curated houses planned in their new four-story building at Canalside, Amelia Blake, Senior Manager of Learning and Education noted:

E&M at Canalside is designed for and about WNY [Western New York]. Each of our Play Zones and exhibits are representative of the community we live in. This includes the representation of the cultures that make up that community. By showcasing how the Seneca/Haudenosaunee cultures interact with the environment, we hope to encourage children and adults to learn the importance of caring for our environment, as they [the Native peoples] have done so for centuries. (Blake 2018)

In my capacity as a college educator, media artist, and New York State Folk Arts consultant, I have worked with Haudenosaunee communities, artists, and Explore & More Museum educators on Haudenosaunee Days of Sharing. My perspective and passion for the programs are informed by the fact that I was born in western New York, in close proximity to Seneca or Onöndowa'ga:' (*Oh-nobn-dob-wanh!-gawh!*) reservations, where the names of rivers, towns, and parks mark the presence of the Haudenosaunee and their legacy. Over the years, my own perception of the environment has deepened, from direct experiences with and mentorship by Haudenosaunee storytellers, scholars, and friends.

Marian Miller, a Seneca elder, storyteller, and beadworker who served as an interpreter and trail guide in the early days at Ganondagan, was the first person to introduce me to the cosmology and worldview of the Haudenosaunee. Through my visits with her and trips to Ganondagan, I heard their Creation Story and learned how Skywoman, whose precipitous fall to Earth, landing on the back of a turtle, was softened by the help of animals and birds.<sup>3</sup> As Marian noted, there is a dance that honors Haudenosaunee women, which resembles the movement of Skywoman's feet, causing the earth on the back of that turtle to grow. I also learned that Skywoman carried seeds of foodstuffs, medicine plants in her hand from the Skyworld. Considered a gift from the Creator, Corn, Beans, and Squash, called *Jöhehgöh Gaga:'* and meaning the Three Sisters or Sustainers of Life in the Seneca language, allowed the Haudenosaunee to survive long winters by providing all the essential nutrients for life. Planted together in mounds, The Three Sisters' Garden at Ganondagan showcased some of the ways in which ecologically sound, centuries-old practices allowed beans to replenish the nitrogen in the soil depleted by the corn.

Through the oral tradition and stories, songs and dances about Skywoman, the Three Sisters, medicine plants, and animals, Haudenosaunee children learn to appreciate and give thanks for the diversity of the natural world at an early age. Visually, the beadwork designs that adorn the traditional dress, as well as personal items of the Haudenosaunee dancers and singers at Ganondagan, reflect

G. Peter Jemison (Seneca, Heron Clan), artist and Site Manager of Ganondagan State Historic Site and Seneca Arts and Cultural Center, will be giving the Thanksgiving Address, or *Ganö:nyö:k*, at the opening ceremony of the 2018 American Folklore Society Conference in Buffalo and participating in the forum on TEK in museums and arts centers. Photo taken at Ganondagan by Christine Zinni, 2015.





## INDIGENOUS WOMEN: HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTIONS AND ACTIVISM

Buffalo & Erie County Central Public Library  
March 30, 2017



Handout from recent event co-sponsored and organized by Indigenous Women’s Initiative and University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Courtesy of Pat Shelly, director of Community Engagement and Expansion at University of Buffalo School of Social Work. The conference was organized under the auspices of Hilary Weaver (Lakota), a Professor and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at University of Buffalo, with the help of Agnes Williams (Seneca), one of the featured speakers. *Cover Art: “Still Dancing” by Jonathan Labillois.*

ecological elements of the Creation story by depicting plants and local clan animals and birds that comprise essential parts of their cosmology. Recitation of the Thanksgiving Address or Ganö:nyö:k (*Gaw-nonb-nyong*), as it is known in the Seneca language, sharpens this focus on the biodiversity of the region even more, as it is said at all Haudenosaunee gatherings and ceremonies. At Ganondagan and different Haudenosaunee events that I have attended, the Ganö:nyö:k acknowledges and gives thanks for the particulars of regional environment—from plentiful waterways that course through the area, to medicine plants like wild strawberries, to the maple trees that provide shade and nourishment, to the two-legged birds and four-legged animals that cohabit the area, to the thunderous and plentiful rainfalls that keep the earth moist and fertile and plants green, and to the sun, moon, and stars that continue to support life.<sup>4</sup>

Fortunate to study works with noted Haudenosaunee scholars, thinkers, and activists—John Mohawk (Seneca), Barry White (Seneca), Rick Hill (Tuscarora), Oren Lyons (Onondaga), and Don Grinde (Yamasee) who founded the Indigenous Studies program at the State University of Buffalo—I learned from them the ways in which Haudenosaunee cosmology informed the rich legacy of political thought and

philosophy propounded by the historical figure called the Peacemaker who brought the “Great Law” to their people.<sup>5</sup> Through oral tradition and practice, the cosmology continues to suffuse the philosophy and practices of the Haudenosaunee. In this intellectual and cultural hub for Haudenosaunee research, and through seminar sessions and conferences in the department, I also have met members of Indigenous Women’s Initiative founded by Agnes Williams (Seneca), and witnessed firsthand the Haudenosaunee women’s leadership roles and activism in advocating for “Nature’s rights” and the clean-up of toxins in the waterways affecting their reservations and the region at large.<sup>6</sup>

After accepting a lectureship position to teach Native Studies at SUNY Brockport in 2007, I was contacted the following year by Claudia Newton, former education director at Explore & More, and folklorist Claire Aubrey. The museum had received grant funds from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the New York Folk Arts Program to create programs. I was asked to do outreach to indigenous artists and community members for their annual Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing for Culture Week. Along with stipends to the artists, funds from the grant would be used for documentation of artists’ work that would go into activity booklets to provide broader context for the workshops in the programs. Artist-driven decisions about the themes in the programs and content in the booklets were intended to counter stereotypes and engage visitors to the museum in learning about the history and beliefs of the Haudenosaunee through storytelling, material culture, music and dance performances, and workshops. More than “just facts,” these exchanges underscored the TEK of Haudenosaunee artists and different ways of seeing, perceiving, and understanding the workings of the natural world.<sup>7</sup>



Traditional Haudenosaunee pottery created by Peter Jones (Onondaga). Photo taken in 2009 in artist’s workshop on the Cattaraugus Reservation by Christine Zinni.

### Life in the Longhouse—A Spiritual and Sensory Experience

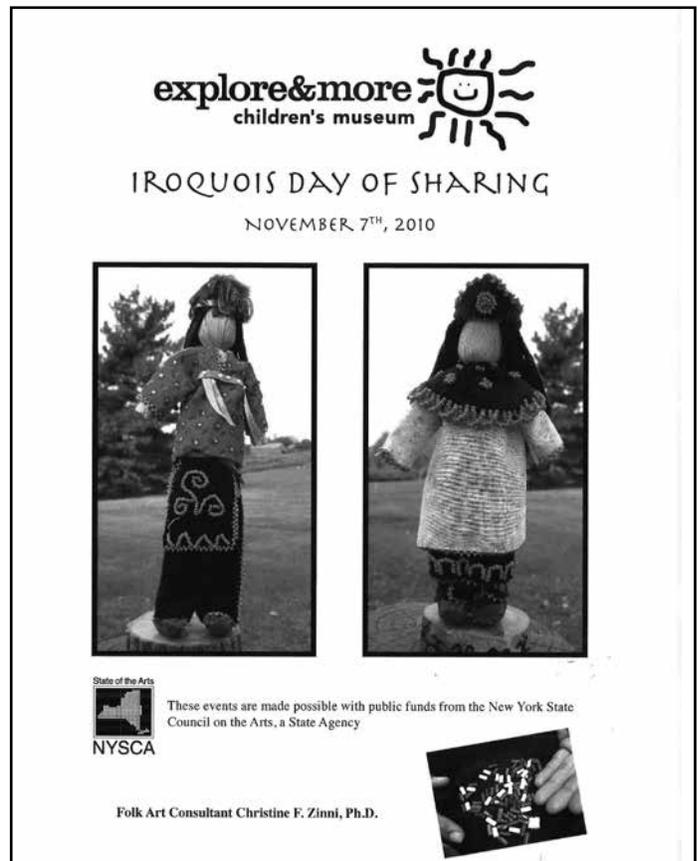
In 2008, Claudia put me in contact with Peter Jones (Onondaga, Beaver Clan), a



Traditional Jöhehgöh, or Three Sisters' Garden in front of bark longhouse at Ganondagan Historic Site. Photo by Christine Zinni, 2016.

renowned clay artist brought up on the Seneca Cattaraugus Reservation, who had previously worked with the museum on individual workshops. Discussions with him followed, along with documentation of his work using local clay; he demonstrated a method of using coils to create traditional Haudenosaunee pottery and stamping tools called rockers, made from bones and antlers of animals, stone seashells, and wood, to create patterns for the decoration of the pots. His workshop at the Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing would create awareness of the Earth and local animals and shells. In this regard, it was determined that the activities related to his workshop in the booklet for the 2009 program would familiarize children with how the Haudenosaunee peoples' lives in traditional longhouses were based on ecologically sound aspects of their food practices and related to their pottery. Thus, in so many ways, Peter's workshop not only helped children tune into the historical practices of the Haudenosaunee, but also conjured up parts of the Creation Story, in which the Creator of Life picks up a handful of dirt and says, "the Earth is alive!"

The Haudenosaunee population around the city of Buffalo is predominantly comprised of members of the Seneca, Tuscarora, and Tonawanda Nations. Contacts at the Tuscarora Nation School near Niagara Falls lead me to noted beadworker



Cover of the 2010 Iroquois Day of Sharing Booklet with photos of Ronnie Reitter's corn husk dolls. Courtesy of the author.



Ronnie Reitter (Seneca, Wolf Clan) Storytelling and Corn Husk Doll Workshop, E&M, 2010. Photo by Christine Zinni.

Doreen Rickard, an elder from the Tuscarora Nation. A beadworker and leatherworker, she decided to give a workshop that involved a simple leatherworking activity for children and recognition of some land, water, and air clan animals. Through these means, Doreen also raised awareness of the environment and the particular animals that inhabit the region—from deer and bear, to turtles and beavers, to herons, hawks, and snipes.

Along with the tactile experiences of pottery and leatherworking, we stressed the sensory experiences of taste in this program. On Peter's recommendation, I contacted Arlette Stevens (Seneca) who ran a restaurant just down the road from where he lived on the Seneca Cattaraugus Reservation. A meeting and interview with her led to recipes for and inclusion of two kinds of traditional corn soup and strawberry drink for the program. It also created the opportunity to include one of my mentor Marian Miller's stories about "How Wild Strawberries, Ojisdöda'shä' (*o jis don dot shat*) Brought Peace," which highlights the healing properties of the plant.

### The Gift of Sustenance: Corn or Oneö' (*o nay oat*)

Dewhurst and Hendrick's (2016) article on "Dismantling Racism in Museum Education" notes the erasure of the beliefs, cultures, and bodies of people of color. In 2010, with another year of funding from NYSCA and the New York Folk Arts Grant, we were able to work with Haudenosaunee artists and community members to organize the Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing program for Culture Week again and highlight some of their traditional practices as they relate to the natural world, countering, in so many ways, parts of that erasure.

I contacted Ronnie Reitter (Seneca, Wolf Clan), who I knew through her work as a storyteller in the Bark Longhouse at Ganondagan and interpreter on its trails, as well as educator at the Rochester Museum & Science Center. Ronnie specializes in storytelling, beadwork, traditional clothing, and corn husk arts. Her workshops involved making corn husk dolls, while her stories underscored the roles that different elements of the corn plant played in the everyday life of Haudenosaunee people—from food, to

matting for beds and insulation of the traditional longhouse, to items of play—hence, accentuating gratitude for this singular gift of Creation that allowed the Haudenosaunee to survive, as well as noting lessons about waste.

There were enough funds to support a dance group to give a performance and short workshop in the program. Niagara River Dance Troupe, lead by elders Nina and Orville Greene (Tuscarora), who taught their son Randy and other members of their family, as well as other members of the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, to perform traditional songs and dances. Ceremonial dances are not permitted in public settings, so the troupe performed social dances in which a lead singer uses a water drum called *Ga'nöhgo:öh* (*Gawh!-nonh-gonh*) and backup singers use horn rattles *onö'gä:' gasdawë'sä'* (*ob-bonh!-ga-gabs-donh-wen!-shah*) to give thanks, honor gifts of Creation, and reinforce traditional teachings. For example, as Randy notes, in their Round Dance, dancers move to the right, then shift to the left—this movement is meant to teach the importance of balance in all things. As Randy called attention to beadwork on the regalia of the dancers and singers—from their dresses, leggings, headdresses, barrettes, collars, breechcloths, leggings, and moccasins—and noted how it emphasized their appreciation of and connection to the animals of the region and also signified their clans.

We also reached out to Tuscarora elders/storytellers Jay and Teresa Clause and their daughter Jill, who is also a beadworker and member of the Indigenous Women's network. For their workshop, Jay and Teresa brought artifacts and prepared traditional Tuscarora corn soup, made from green corn. They talked about the significance of different heritage corn seeds. Jill related the Haudenosaunee Creation story, showed different beadwork items that reflected elements of the story, and also gave a workshop in which children made beaded bracelets. In this way, through collaborative work with these multigenerational artists in 2010, in our program and activity booklets,



The Niagara River Dancers at the Sanborn Family Farm Festival. Photos courtesy of the Greene Family archives.

learners were introduced to the narrative of the Haudenosaunee Creation Story and *Onco'*—one of main gifts of substance and survival for the Haudenosaunee, as well as for immigrant groups that settled in the region.<sup>8</sup>

### A Word on the Process

Outreach to community members and organizations, identification of artists, and meetings or telephone conversations with them to plan workshops took several months, as many of the Haudenosaunee artists live on reservations that are 30-60 or more miles from the city of Buffalo. That coupled with research and fieldwork documenting artists' work and interviews and events went into each 12-page activity booklet, co-authored with the artists, and with Claudia Newton and former Artistic Director Jeannet de Jong's help, executed in 11x 8-inch format with color pages on the cover and back. At every step of the publication and program, artists participated in the decision-making process and representations



Storytellers Jay and Teresa Clause (Tuscarora, Deer and Turtle Clans). Photo by Christine Zinni.



Former artistic director, Jeannet de Jong, 2012. Photo by Christine Zinni.

of their work. Moreover, the booklets were not simply handouts to children and adults at the programs, but meant to further engage learners in conversations with the artists and staff about Haudenosaunee history, beliefs, and traditions. From my experience working with the Haudenosaunee community, I was aware of issues involving use of image and representation of worldview and beliefs. Each interview segment and activity page in the booklet was sent to each artist for feedback and approval, while the booklet as a whole was sent out to everyone for a consensus of approval before printing. As

can be well imagined, this collaborative process was lengthy, but necessary and correct, as it corresponded to Haudenosaunee views about respect for individual perspectives, but also consensus among the group before something moves forward.

The Play Stations in the museum are geared primarily to pre-school–8th grade children. Further challenges in the booklet were to appeal to young children but strike as much of a balance as possible to appeal to multigenerations. For this reason, text aimed to provide background on the Haudenosaunee—their beliefs, practices, and knowl-

edge—could not always be covered as extensively as one might find in a book geared primarily for adults. Each booklet did contain numerous images and drawings by Jeannet de Jong. For instance, based on photos of Ronnie Reitter's corn husk dolls, Jeannet created a coloring page that was meant to engage younger children in conversation with Ronnie and help them recognize and learn about different elements of traditional Haudenosaunee clothing and about plants, birds, and animals depicted in her beadwork designs.

### **The Three Sisters: Medicinal Plants and the Thanksgiving Address, or Ganō:nyö:k**

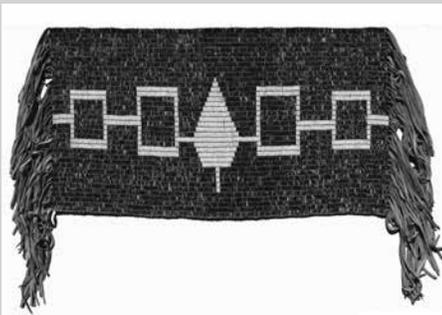
With continued funding from grants, along with fundraising efforts on the part of the museum, in 2011 an expanded effort included reaching out to Buffalo's Native American Culture Center and Services (NACC). Ruchatneet Printup (Tuscarora), coordinator at the Center, introduced me to beadworker Vivian Bradley (Six Nations, Canada, Turtle Clan), who designed a workshop in which children made strawberries from felt and learned that wild strawberries or Ojisdöda'shä' were considered medicine plants with healing properties by the Haudenosaunee. Like Jill's workshop the year before, through this activity, the children were introduced to beading techniques. Ruchatneet also contacted his son Gahnew Printup, whose group called *The Bundled Arrows Singers and Dancers* (a reference to the Peacemaker's teaching and call to unity among individual Haudenosaunee Nations) performed social dances in which many children were happy to participate.

Jill Clause shared traditional stories that stressed gratitude and human relations to plants and animals—like the Three Sisters or Ganō:nyö:k, which are considered gifts from the Creator that sustain and nurture the Haudenosaunee. She noted how plants served as food, clothing, works of arts, games, and healing in traditional Haudenosaunee society, and how gratitude for



Vivian Bradley's beadwork collar. Photo by Christine Zinni.

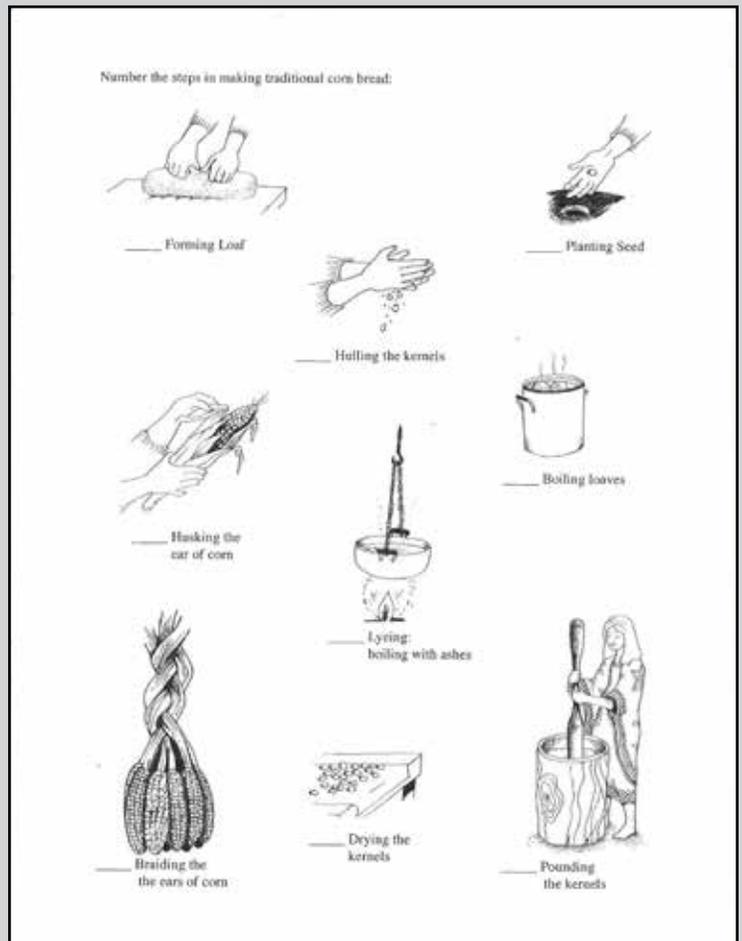
Vivian Bradley (Mohawk, Six Nations), 2011. Photo by Christine Zinni.



Hiawatha Wampum Belt, symbolizing the original five nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy: the square on left represents the Seneca Nation (Keepers of the Western Door of the Longhouse); the tree in the middle, The Great White Pine, symbol of the Confederacy and Onondaga Nation (Firekeepers of the Council of Chiefs); and the square on the far right, the Mohawk Nation (Keepers of the Eastern Door). The other two squares represent the Cayuga and Oneida Nations. The Tuscarora Nation entered the Confederacy (1722) after it was formed. Belt crafted by Richard D. Hamell. Photo courtesy of Richard D. Hamell.



Jöhehgöh, or Three Sisters, the Sustainers. Courtesy of Rochester Museum & Science Center.



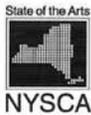
"Number the steps in making traditional corn bread." Activity page from 2012 Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing. Drawings by Jeannet de Jong. Courtesy of the author.

## HAUDENOSAUNEE DAY OF SHARING

JULY 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2012



Folk Art Consultant Christine F. Zinni, Ph.D.



These events are made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency

Cover page of 2012 Activity Booklet showing Jill Clause (*left*) and Emma Greene (*right*) in beadwork outfits. Jill's beadwork collar was made by Cheryl Greene. Image of booklet courtesy of the author.

these gifts is expressed in the telling and retelling of the Creation Story and the Ganö:nyök or Thanksgiving Address. Her workshop also involved a planting activity, which corresponded to activity pages in the booklet on the Three Sisters and introduction of Seneca words.

Once again, although the preparation of the booklets was a long process, with several rounds of interviews and documentation and representation approved, amended, or enhanced, the results were booklets that were co-authored by the artists and a program that was determined in collaboration with them.

### Creation Story and the Tuscarora Nation's Picnic Field Days

Through my work with Tuscarora artists, I was encouraged to attend the Tuscarora Picnic and Field Day in July of 2011, which I had heard had been celebrated in a clearing in the woods, near the Tuscarora Nation School in Niagara Falls for 173 years. The three-day event features competition, dances, vendors, and arts and crafts. Traditional corn soup was made in large cauldrons, a practice that involved community members getting together earlier to hull, pound, and prepare the kernels. During the picnic, I documented Jill, her children, and parents in traditional dress joining in the dance competitions; tables that involved beadwork competitions; and a display and newsletter published by the local Haudenosaunee Environmental Network.

Through Claudia Newton's connections with Vince Schiffert, an educator at the Nation School, in the fall of the 2011, I attended a corn-braiding session at Norton and Marlene Rickard's farm on the Tuscarora Reservation with a friend from the Seneca Tonawanda Reservation. From documentation, discussions, and interviews at these two events, we worked collaboratively with different members of the Tuscarora community to develop activities in the 2012 booklet, which accompanied the Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing program related to

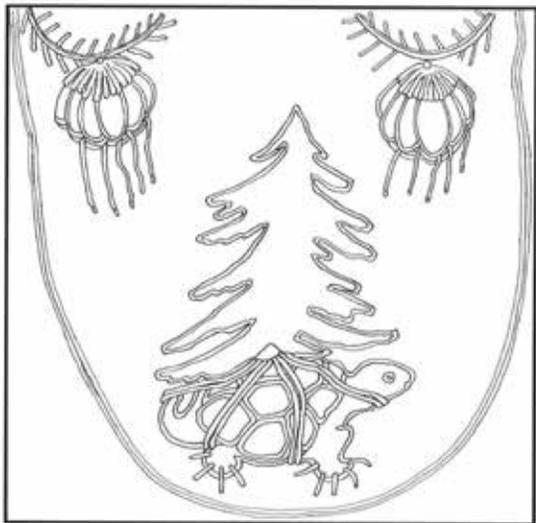


Image from page in 2011 Activity Booklet of Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing. Drawing by Jeannet de Jong, based on elements of the Haudenosaunee Creation Story, as depicted in images on Jill Clause's beadwork collar. As Jill notes, the images on her collar represent two stories: that of the Creation Story and that of the Peacemaker. The image of the Turtle reminds you of the Creation Story of the Haudenosaunee, how life got started on "Turtle Island." The White Pine Tree symbolizes the message of Peace brought to the Haudenosaunee by a man they call "The Peacemaker." Many centuries ago, he traveled around this region and asked people to lay down their implements of war under the Tree of Peace. The White Roots of the Tree symbolize his message of peace being spread in all directions. The Peacemaker said that if a person is of a "Good Mind" and seeks peace and justice, he or she can find shelter under the Tree.

the practices around planting, processing, and preparation of corn.

Once again, Jill's bead workshop stressed elements of the Creation Story. In our 2012 program, she related it to the beadwork designs on her collar or yoke and the regalia she wore at Tuscarora Field Days, which were documented in the booklet. Another activity in the booklet centered about the process of making traditional cornbread from planting of the heirloom seeds, husking the ears of corn, braiding the corn for stages, hulling and drying and lying with ashes, pounding kernels and boiling loaves. Jill brought in

some cornbread and strawberry drink for children and their parents to taste.

Randy Greene and his family, who also entered competitions at the Tuscarora Field Days, gave a dance workshop at this program. Noting how his performances were meant to honor the Earth and gift of Creation, he underscored some of the ways in which dance brings happiness. My motto is "Live, Eat, Pray. Love and Dance!" he said.

In the intervening years between 2013 and 2016, Jill Clause, Randy Greene, and several other Haudenosaunee artists were asked to give workshops and performances during

E&M summer outdoor programs, along the waterfront, as well as individual events during the year. During this time, I was asked by the museum to do research and outreach in Yemeni and Burmese communities for the NYSFA Folk Arts Programs for the museum's Culture Week.

In 2017, in collaboration with Amelia Blake, Senior Manager of Learning and Education in the museum's transition to its new site at Canalside, I reached out to artists on the Cattaraugus and Allegany Reservations to help create another Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing. To this end, Onondaga clay artist Peter Jones; Samantha Jacobs, Seneca beadworker, involved in revitalization efforts of language and gardening on the Cattaraugus Reservation; and Alan George (Cayuga), wampum holder at the Longhouse on the Allegany Reservation and his son Jake (Seneca) gave workshops. (Profiles of these artists are included at the end of this article.)

Working together on booklets, the format was changed to a smaller size that children could carry with them and have signed by the artists. With Samantha's help, we strived to incorporate more Seneca words for children to learn. In comparison to past years, the amount of text was lessened, but the amount of imagery was enhanced to appeal to and involve younger audiences, encouraging them to interact with the artists and ask more questions.

The 2018 program was part of museum's process to reach out to indigenous communities in the region and incorporate their history and culture into the design of exhibits and programming at the new building along the waterfront. As Amelia Blake noted:

This process began in 2016 with a meeting with the Seneca-Iroquois National Museum. E&M staff shared our exhibit plans with the staff from SINM [Seneca-Iroquois National Museum 2013] and incorporated feedback on how to incorporate Seneca culture throughout the Museum. One idea that came from this meeting was the design of "Little Slip" in our Moving Water Play Zone. This area is designed for our youngest visitors and will evoke Seneca and



Wild strawberries, a medicine plant indigenous to the area, said to be brought to the Earth by Skywoman in the Haudenosaunee Creation Story. Beadwork by Annette Mary Clause, an accomplished Tuscarora beadworker who has won many national awards for her designs since the age of 18. Mary has taught classes at the Tuscarora Nation School and has influenced many other Haudenosaunee beadworkers in the area over the years.



Amelia Blake, Senior Manager of Learning and Education at E&M, at strawberry workshop at 2018 Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing. Photo by Christine Zinni.

Haudenosaunee cultural traditions. Haudenosaunee artist Lyle Logan (Seneca/Deer Clan) created a unique work of art which overlays Little Slip, simulating a water table or basin where children can play and learn. Clan imagery and other important symbols are incorporated along the base of the tables/basin and hang from the ceiling above. The imagery is designed to highlight Haudenosaunee culture and beliefs and

the significance of water in sustaining the region's plants, animals, and birds and maintaining a delicate ecological balance. (Blake 2018)

In early 2017, E&M made the decision to showcase the Seneca Nation as one of our three community-curated houses within the new museum. Underscoring the fact that the museum staff will be working with

individuals and organizations within the Seneca Nation “at every step of the process to ensure our community-curated houses are planned, designed, and executed in a way that respectfully highlights the beauty and traditions of the Seneca,” Amelia states that artists are critical in this process, “because children and families easily relate to art. It is a common ground between cultures and a beautiful way to visually represent cultures in a new light.”

The Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the Haudenosaunee will not only be reflected in the design of the museum's water exhibit and the curated “house,” but also in exhibits and programs which, according to Blake, “explore how Haudenosaunee culture interacts with the environment in which we live and how this differs from other cultures.” Three Sisters' Agriculture will be a part of this learning experience at the museum, because as Amelia notes, “the Haudenosaunee culture has a unique way of growing vegetables—the Three Sisters planting, where in the same mound, they grow beans, corn, and squash. Each plant helps the others grow stronger and create a balanced meal once eaten. This type of planting will be represented in the new Museum.”

Aiming to “provide the best in play experiences where all children, families, and the community can explore, learn, and develop together,” Amelia emphasizes the fact that “in order to help fulfill our mission, we want every visitor to see themselves in our Museum—this includes representing the different cultures and communities that make up our diverse region!”

As Hoffman, Lemmon, and Shultes (2018) underscore in their article about “Breaking Down Stereotypes at the Iroquois Indian Museum,” museums can be vehicles for initiating change by presenting different points of view. The voices, viewpoints, artworks, and expressive culture of Haudenosaunee storytellers, artists, and musicians of our region not only help to counter stereotypes, but point to ways in which visitors to museums and art centers can further appreciate, understand, and act as good stewards of our fragile environment in a time of rapid environmental change. ▼

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This term is in current use. For instance, the National Park Service defines Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as “the on-going accumulation of knowledge, practice and belief about relationships between living beings in a specific ecosystem that is acquired by indigenous people over hundreds or thousands of years through direct contact with the environment, handed down through generations, and used for life-sustaining ways.... It encompasses the worldview of a people, which includes ecology, spirituality, human and animal relationships, and more (NPS 2016). See, also, Robbins (2018) and his reference to anthropologist Wade Davis’ use of the term ‘ethnosphere’ to indicate the collective ‘sum total of all thoughts and dreams, myths, ideas, inspirations brought into being by human imagination since the dawn of consciousness....’
- <sup>2</sup> “Native Eyes” (Falk and Juan 2016) is exemplary in its focus on the process of building partnerships and programs that raise not only cultural awareness but also environmental awareness. Mike Murawski’s (2016) “The Urgency of Empathy and Social Impact in Museums” and Marit Dewhurst and Keonna Hendrick’s (2016) “Dismantling Racism” are also excellent articles based on best practices and pedagogy found in the *Journal of Folk Arts and Education* issue on “Intersections: Folklore and Museum Education.”
- <sup>3</sup> See John Mohawk’s “Iroquois Creation Story,” a retelling of a 19th-century version of Chief John Arthur Gibson’s (Onondaga, Six Nations “Reserve,” Grand River) story about the “Myth of the Earthgrasper” to ethnologist J. N. B. Hewitt, subsequently published in *The Annual Report from the Bureau of Ethnology* in 1928. First hearing the story from Marian, I was honored to work on independent study with Mohawk at SUNY/ Buffalo where, under his guidance, I looked at different published versions of the sacred story. See Mohawk (2005b).

- <sup>4</sup> Peter Jemison (Seneca, Heron Clan), Artist and Historic Site Manager at Ganondagan will be opening the American Folklore Conference in Buffalo with the Ganö:nyök.
- <sup>5</sup> Among other places, the story of the Peacemaker and his teachings are contained in books authored by scholars from the American Studies Department at SUNY/ Buffalo. See José Barriero’s (2010) *Thinking in Indian: A John Mohawk Reader* (published posthumously after Mohawk’s death in 2007), as well as Lyons’ and Mohawk’s (1991) *Exiled in the Land of the Free* and Mohawk’s (2005a) Introduction to *Basic Call to Consciousness*. I note the influence of this time in the American Studies Department in my essay “Becoming Storied” (Zinni 2017).
- <sup>6</sup> Agnes has been involved in longstanding work on environmental issues. See *Emerging Activist Leadership Conference* (EALP 2010), a video produced in collaboration with Agnes Williams and the Indigenous Women’s Network (IWN 2014), through a Ford Foundation Grant.
- <sup>7</sup> See “Native Knowledge Article: What Ecologists are Learning from Native Peoples” (Robbins 2018).
- <sup>8</sup> Haudenosaunee used shell beads and quills before the introduction of glass beads by European contact. See Richard Hamell’s (2017) work on wampum belts and Rick Hill’s (2017) drawings of early beadwork.
- <sup>9</sup> Hoffman, Lemmon, and Shultes (2018) wrote about the groundbreaking exhibit “Tonto, Teepees, and Totem Poles: Considering Native American Stereotypes in the 21st Century” at the Iroquois Indian Museum in the Mohawk Valley, west of Albany.

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## Further Reading

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Christine F. Zinni, PhD, is an educator, media artist, and independent folklorist. She has worked as a Folk Arts consultant for Explore & More Children's Museum programs since



2009. Along with documentation of events for local Haudenosaunee organizations, she teaches indigenous studies and food and culture courses at the State University at Brockport. The circumstances that led to this work are discussed in "Becoming Storied," referenced in the bibliography (Zinni 2017). *Photo: Author near large old sycamore tree, Adamson House Museum and Garden, Malibu, CA. Photo by Joseph Sciorra.*

## Field Days on the Tuscarora Reservation

Since 1840, Tuscarora people of all ages have gathered together to celebrate their annual Picnic and Field Days on the Tuscarora Reservation near Niagara Falls, New York. Held in a large glen north of the Tuscarora Indian school near Route 31, it features Native drumming and dancing, raised beadwork competitions, a contest for Miss Tuscarora, and footraces, as well as a fireball "medicine" game for healing. Traditional Tuscarora corn soup and cornbread is made in large cauldrons in the center of the clearing, and strawberry drink and Indian fry bread are also available. The Haudenosaunee Environmental Youth Corps (HEYC) have a table at the Picnic where they discuss the projects they are working on with young people. The Youth Corps "seek to envision and build environmental and cultural restoration at the community, Nation, and Confederacy levels," by involving Tuscarora youth in a variety of projects from retracing the migration history of the Tuscarora people by canoe and foot, to restoration of wetlands, and raising awareness of local plants and animals. For more information on the activities of the HEYC, see the website: <http://www.hetf.org/projects>



Making traditional corn bread at the Tuscarora Picnic. Photo by Christine Zinni.

## Jill Clause

Raised headwork is highly prized in our Tuscarora community. It gives a three-dimensional look. We live in a beautiful colorful world! It is so nice to see flowers, birds, and leaves in beadwork. You also will see designs based on the Sky Dome, Essential Fire in our Longhouses, and the Celestial Tree.

Something that I loved about the Creation Story, even as a young girl, is that it helped me understand my place in the natural world—in the natural order. It talks about Grandfather Sun—how He got to be here, the Moon—how She got to be there, Mother Earth, the back of a Turtle, women's place—it all falls into place. You can adorn yourself with the Creation Story through your beadwork. You can wear it on your sleeves and on your leggings. In this way, beadwork is not only about wearing something beautiful and being beautiful, but acknowledging the natural world that we live in: the strawberries, birds, flowers—everything that we value as Haudenosaunee people is there.

I am a Tuscarora Turtle woman with traditional values. We are a matrilineal society. Everything has been passed down from our mother as far back as times go. I hope that what we as a people have preserved can help the children in this world. I like to work with children with wire and beads. My grandmother, Sarah Dubuc was a wireworker. She had 13 children. Beading was her passion! She never taught me. I just looked at her work and learned. I hope to share with children at Explore & More what I have learned from her.



Jill Clause at Tuscarora Picnic, July 2012. Photo by Christine Zinni.



Jill Clause dancing at Tuscarora Picnic, July, 2012. Photo by Christine Zinni.

# Artist Statement of Peter Jones

**PETER JONES** (*Onondaga, Beaver Clan*) is a renowned potter and sculptor whose work has been exhibited at numerous museums, including the Smithsonian. Most recently, he has been honored with the First Nations Award for his artwork. He was able to hone his skill as a potter and learn ancient techniques from a Hopi teacher, Otellie Loloma. Peter is known for incorporating what he calls “Indian Humor” into his work.

I use clay as a medium because I can work with it directly and form it into whatever I wish to express. The artwork that I make is based on my heritage and my experiences growing up on the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation.

I create pottery and ceramic sculpture using two methods. Much of my work is wheel thrown and kiln fired, but I also use native clays to make hand-built, coiled pottery that is pit fired in a wood fire. These pots reflect our original Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) pottery, which was made with local clay gathered from streambeds and altered with the addition of crushed shell, crushed granitic rock, and sand to create a clay body that was useful and durable after it was fired.

Clay itself has long been recognized as having healing properties. It has been used on wounds, bee stings, and in cooking to remove poisons from certain foods. Working with clay has also been found to be useful to maintain and heal mental health.

When I began researching our Iroquois pottery and teaching myself how to make it, my objective was to build a core group of potters throughout the Six Nations Confederacy. I learned how to make a pot from start to finish with nothing more than a supply of clay, a few handmade tools, and fire. This was over 25 years ago, and over that time, through trial and error, I have developed methods of making and firing pots that have proven to be quite successful. I have offered classes and workshops throughout the Six Nations Communities to share with others



Peter Jones and Lenore Waukau with Peter's prize-winning ceramic artworks at Ganondagan's 2017 Music and Dance Festival. Photo by Christine Zinni.

what I have learned. My instruction begins with finding the natural clay, processing it, and forming pottery with it.

When people think of Native pottery, they think of Southwestern pottery. I want to change this and make it clear that the

Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people had a pottery history, too, and that our pottery continues to have cultural resonance among us. Our identity is vital to our survival as a people.

Our people are also victims of trauma, whether intergenerational or generational. To create with clay and to make old-style pottery and clay ceremonial pipes connects us to a way of life that we admire. When people are working with clay—whether it be my own people or children and adults in museum and art center settings, they are focused on producing something that is uniquely theirs, something that they imagine in their mind’s eye and that will result in an object that has meaning to them. It is relaxing and allows your mind to think creatively. Aggression can be taken out on the clay, as you pound it and work it into a usable state. If a pot breaks, it can be repaired or rebuilt. There are no mistakes; there is only learning, as in life. Clay work involves the elements of earth, wind, water, and fire—the basic elements of life that, when combined correctly, yield an object of beauty and function.

Bringing back something that has been lost to time has given me a sense of satisfaction, and I am intent on passing this on to others. Those learning to create pottery are participating not only in reviving an ancient art but also by connecting to their inner selves. These lessons are valuable to making us whole as a people again.

I think Haudenosaunee people’s involvement in all aspects of the representation of our culture is important to convey a true and realistic interpretation of who we are. In the past, museums have been built to house artifacts as proof of our existence, as though we were no longer a people. It’s important that we speak up and take part. As for what the children gain by meeting and watching a “real” Native person work and live—it gives them a different perspective that we are a living, viable culture in the 21st century.



Clay “rockers” or stamps made by Peter for use in decorating edges of pots with traditional designs. Photo by Christine Zinni.



Peter’s pottery and clay stamps, or rockers, used as models for children at 2018 Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing. Photo by Christine Zinni.

# Artist Statement of Samantha Jacobs



Samantha Jacobs (Seneca, Turtle Clan) giving strawberry workshop at 2018 Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing. Photo by Christine Zinni.

**SAMANTHA JACOBS** (*Seneca*) of the Turtle Clan learned beadwork, as a child, from her mother. After years of traveling the Pow Wow Trail, she became proficient in leath-erwork, as well as beadwork. Samantha was an active member of the Buffalo Creek Dancers, which functioned as both a performance and edu-cational group, traveling the country to perform. As a community educator, she has expanded her repertoire to include other traditional arts like tufting and quillwork. She showcases her bead-work in juried art shows and is a member of the Native Roots Artist's Guild. She has won awards for her beadwork designs in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

I incorporate the motifs symbolic of the Creation story into my work, because the knowledge and cultural heritage of my



Red Rad Hatter features caribou tufting and raised beadwork. All photos courtesy of Samantha Jacobs.

People find the foundation of who we are from the story. I see beadwork as an opportunity to showcase my skills as an artist, but also as an educational opportunity. For those who see the beads, it is a chance to understand more about who we are as Haudenosaunee—an opportunity to see the iconography of what we hold dear, what we believe in, and what we give thanks for.

The Three Sisters, in Seneca, more correctly termed *Jöhehgöh*, is translated as “Our Life Sustainers.” We acknowledge not only the sustenance provided, but also the supportive nature and delicate balance of the food system of *Jöhehgöh* in our Thanksgiving Address and in our motifs found in our art.

Wild strawberries known as *Shesa:h Ojisdöda’shä’* are considered a medicine, because they are the first berry of the year. The Haudenosaunee give thanks for and acknowledges strawberries during the Thanksgiving Address and when they ripen in June. Strawberries are also prominent in Haudenosaunee beadwork designs. A five-petal flower in beadwork design is sometimes used to represent the original Haudenosaunee Nations: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca.

Traditional ecological knowledge involves understanding that there is a balance to the world, knowing not to take more than what you need, learning to do no harm, and seeing these concepts firsthand as instrumental to learning and carrying them forward. These traditional concepts are foundational to understanding the relationship that we as people have with the environment.

I feel it is important that museums and art centers invite indigenous artists to share their knowledge and beliefs. Being able to talk and work with knowledge bearers, such as indigenous artists, gives the public at museums and art centers chances to ask questions and interact on personal levels that could not happen in any other form. Each interaction is a teachable moment. What’s the purpose of a museum if it’s not to learn and pass on knowledge? Nothing beats learning from the source.



Detail of a raised beaded six-petal flower commonly used among Haudenosaunee beadwork.



Raised beaded sunflower on turquoise velvet moccasin vamps.

# Artist Statement of Alan George

**ALAN GEORGE** (*Cayuga*) of the Bear Clan is a wampum holder and Faithkeeper of the Allegany Seneca at the Coldspring Longhouse on the Allegany Reservation. His son, Jake George (*Seneca*) of the Turtle Clan is a member of the Seneca Nation, a language teacher, and wampum helper alongside his father. They are both champion Smoke Dancers, who strongly believe in their traditions.

Most of our social dances are about what the Creator has provided us and honor all parts of nature—the plants, and animals. I learned both the ceremonial and social dances from elders in my community. I have a format when we do our social dances in public: in our first dance, we honor our women, because we are a matrilineal society, and they are our lifegivers, sustainers, and clan mothers. It is said that when women are dancing, they are caressing Mother Earth. We also perform a moccasin dance, which honors our ancestors, who passed our customs and traditions on to us. We have a fish dance, one of the ways we acknowledge and give thanks for life in the waters. Our social dances were given to us as “medicine,” because of hard days we had worked. During the evening, dancing relieved those hardships. These dances are taught and learned from generation to generation; they keep our cultural ways intact and offer thanks for Creation.

We use a water drum made out of wood that has water in it, and as you hit it, the vibration goes into the motion of air and carries the sound. I recall when I was young, my dad would start singing, and other singers would show up from three-quarters of a mile away. When you beat on the drum, it is like a heartbeat. We use horn rattles from cows in our social dances and turtle rattles for our ceremonial dances, and Great Feather for medicine society. On



Jake (Seneca, Turtle Clan) and Alan (Cayuga, Bear Clan) George. Photo courtesy of artists.

back of a turtle, the thirteen squares represent 13 moons; there are 28 marks on the turtle’s sides, the number of days in our months. That is why we say, “the world is on a turtle’s back.” That is how

the Creation story started; birds saw her (Skywoman) fall, and they put her on the back of a turtle. Muskrats went down as far as they could into the water to get earth.



Jake George with children at dance workshop at 2018 Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing dance workshop. Photo by Christine Zinni.

I feel it is important that indigenous artists/musicians and dancers be involved in museum programming, because the first impression that non-native people often have is that we are savages. Once they find out what we do is taking care of the Earth and thanking it, it helps to ease the tensions. That is how education can help.

A lot of times, it is taken for granted that all of nature will be available all the time, but if we ruin it, it won't be there. In the Thanksgiving Address, which has been given for a long time, the first thing we do as people is to give thanks to the people who have come to the gathering and if someone is sick, we ask the Creator and the four Messengers to help. Then, we give thanks to the Earth and everything put on the Earth, so they can be happy with us. We always start with what is on the Earth, then we go up to the Sky, Sun, Moon, and Stars, and the Four Messengers, and our teachers, and the laws they gave us to live by. Then we give thanks again to the Creator, as we

still use the things He provided, because when He thought of the people He wanted each one of us to be happy as we walk this Earth. We thank Him for that.

The same social dances were performed in all the Six Nations of the Confederacy, as it was considered one longhouse. All the dances are still done in all longhouses, and we are all included from oldest to youngest. When a child participates in a dance, he instinctively knows he is part of something that is good, and it gives him enjoyment to be part of something that is true—a sense of the truth. There is also a connection to the older people in our dances; they are a part of that as well, and it is still going on today.

I feel our song and dance performances in different schools, museums, and centers, for different age groups, are good ways to cultivate respect and understanding of Haudenosaunee traditions—because when young people grow up, they will have a different view of Native people. Hatred and animosity will

not be there. They will acknowledge us. We don't say our world is the best; they (non-native people) have their own way. We don't try to push our way of life on people. We make it available for educational purposes, and people find out we are not different than they are, and when they do these things, the mind changes.

If I walk into a museum, they have history and talk of certain things that happened that we know from experience—from oral tradition. A lot of people don't know that when you plant a garden—and I was told by an elder that you could take your shoes off and walk in the garden and your feet will know—the feeling you have from all the earth, the plants, and roots will heal you. The medicine pine trees, if you have problems, will solve them for you. There are medicines planted on this Earth for every illness that is known to man. This is the knowledge I possess. I can only speak for myself; I can't speak for different people.

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