



This is NewsLetter Issue No. Four ~ For the year 2023

The Role Of The Iroquois In The American Revolutionary War

In the previous two issues of this Newsletter, I discussed the emergence of the *Haudenosaunee*, aka the Iroquois Confederacy, out of five tribes. The uniting of the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Mohawk tribes (along with a sixth, the Tuscarora, at a later time) resulted in the adoption of The Great Law of Peace, *i.e.* the *Gayanashagowa* by the member tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy. Adherence to the *Gayanashagowa* ensured that the tribes would support each other for their mutual benefit.



A Grand Sachem at the centre of a crescent-moon maweomi with a Covenant Chain wampum belt in the foreground. From *Moeurs des Sauvages Americains*, Joseph Francois Lafitau, 1724

Were all of the tribes that comprised the Iroquois Confederacy lifelong allies of Great Britain? Absolutely not! Just think back a few

years to the French and Indian War. In that conflict, the French were supported in large numbers by the Abenaki, Huron, Shawnee, Wyandot and Ottawa in addition to certain of the

Iroquois Confederacy (namely, the Mohawk and the Seneca). The British allies consisted primarily of the Catawba and Cherokee.

The Amerindians who were allies of the French did not necessarily love the French. They tolerated the French on their lands because the French had demonstrated that they were not there to make settlements and dispossess the Amerindians of their lands; they were primarily trapping beaver for the pelts. They came and trapped and moved on. The British did not offer

British colonies of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, New Brunswick, Rupert's Land and Port Royal. The various Amerindian tribes who had supported the French previously were not forced to leave their homelands, and they simply shifted their alliances to the British. Of the Iroquois Confederacy, the Seneca and Mohawk became staunch allies of the British by the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War. The Oneida and Tuscarora, on the other hand, sided with the American Patriots.



them the same peaceful coexistence. Everywhere that the English and the people associated with Great Britain (including the Welsh, Irish, Scots, Dutch, Germans and Swiss) went, they cleared the forests and tilled the soil, erecting fences around the lands which they claimed as their own. The Amerindians did not view land ownership in the same way as the Euro~Americans. They felt that no single person or group of people could possess the land; it was for everyone to use. The Amerindian tribes along the eastern seaboard watched as the Euro~American settlers connected to Great Britain pushed westward.

As a result of the British victory over the French in the French and Indian War, the French were defeated and ousted from the Colonies of Quebec and Acadia. The British retained the colony of Quebec and also established the new

The Seneca and Mohawk's primary reason for allying with the British against the American Patriots in the Revolutionary War was their justified fear that if the Patriots were to win, they would continue to push westward, taking more and more of their lands. They remembered that in 1763, at the close of the French and Indian War, King George III had defined a boundary line along the summit of the Appalachians in his *Proclamation of 1763*, and declared that the American colonists were not permitted to cross over it to establish settlements. And they also remembered that the American colonists had violated that Proclamation almost as soon as it was decreed.

For the settlers who had taken up land and homesteaded in the region that was erected as Bedford County in 1771, the allegiance to the

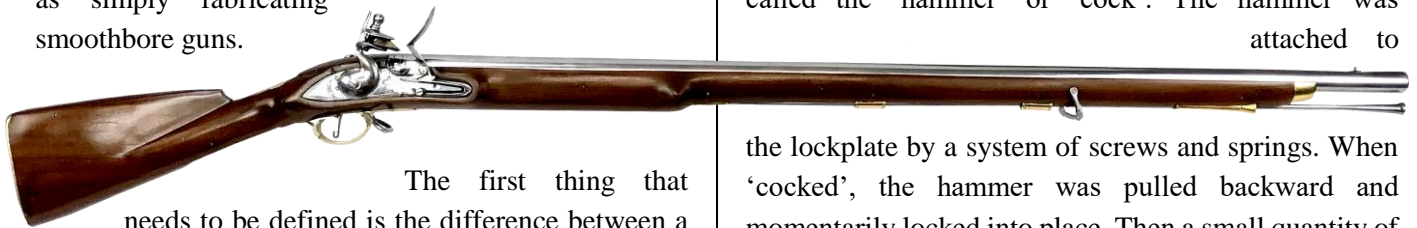
British of the Seneca, in particular, proved disastrous. Through the 1770's, Sir Guy Johnson, commandant of Fort Niagara, sent platoons of soldiers led by British Army Lieutenants to harass the American settlers on the frontiers of Pennsylvania and Virginia. Those British troops headed southward from Fort Niagara and as they passed through the Genesee Valley, they were

joined by scores of Seneca warriors. The intention of the British was to keep the frontier in disruption so that a rift might be forced between the northern and southern colonies. The intention of the Senecas was to force the settlers back east and out of lands they claimed as hunting grounds or routes to their hunting grounds in the region of present-day Kentucky.

Brown Bess

There is an old saying: "All Romans are Italians, but not all Italians are Romans" and the saying can also be applied to the early shoulder arms used during the American Revolutionary War. All Brown Besses were flintlock muskets, but not all flintlock muskets were Brown Besses.

A 'shoulder arm' was any type of weapon designed to be braced on or against the shoulder in order to be fired. Despite the fact that most people refer to the commonly used shoulder arms as 'rifles', not all of those arms were indeed rifled guns. American gunsmiths had the knowledge and ability to cut rifling into the barrel of the guns, but that was not as common as simply fabricating smoothbore guns.



The first thing that needs to be defined is the difference between a musket and a rifle. A musket had a 'smooth bore' meaning that the inside of the gun's barrel had a completely smooth surface. The musket had either a flintlock or a firelock firing mechanism. A rifle, on the other hand had the same type of firing mechanisms, but the inside of the barrel, instead of being smooth, had grooves cut lengthwise and slightly spiraled the entire length of it. The rifling, as the cut grooves were called, forced the ball (or later, bullet) to rotate as it left the muzzle of the gun, and that rotating kept the ball on a straight path toward its target.

The words 'flintlock' and 'matchlock' referred

to the firing mechanism, regardless of the type of shoulder arm. In both cases, an amount of black powder would be poured into the muzzle, or open end of the gun's barrel. The powder would be followed by the 'patch', a wad of paper or cloth and a lead ball (the projectile). The ramrod would be pulled out of its channel underneath the barrel and its large cap end would be inserted into the muzzle and the rod would be rammed down the barrel. The action would push the ball, wadding and powder tightly against the breech, ready for firing.

The flintlock type of firing mechanism consisted of a piece of flint held in a miniature vice called the 'hammer' or 'cock'. The hammer was attached to

the lockplate by a system of screws and springs. When 'cocked', the hammer was pulled backward and momentarily locked into place. Then a small quantity of black priming powder would be poured into the 'flash pan' or 'powder pan'. The 'frizzen', a sort of cover for the flash pan would be eased over the pan, securing the powder from being dropped out or ignited prematurely. Then, when the trigger was pulled, the hammer would be released and a spring would pull it forward and against the frizzen, causing the frizzen to open while simultaneously causing a spark to be produced by the flint hitting the steel surface of the frizzen. The spark would instantly light the now-exposed powder and the resulting explosion would pass through the 'touch hole', at the same time igniting the black powder at the breech,

or base of the barrel. That larger explosion would then propel the ball through the barrel and out the muzzle end. In the event that the sparks do not pass through the touch hole, but only cause the priming powder to explode, the firing is incomplete and it is referred to as a 'flash in the pan'. That phrase is commonly used to describe some action doesn't complete.

The matchlock type of gun is variously called a 'firelock'. The matchlock type of firing mechanism consisted of a lockplate on which a 'serpentine' was attached with a screw. The free end of the serpentine held the smouldering end of a length of cord called the 'match'. A small amount of priming powder would be poured into the flash pan and the pan cover would be closed. When ready to fire the musket, the soldier would blow on the end of the match cord to make it burn hotter and at the same time he would open the flash pan's cover. The trigger would be pulled and it would release the serpentine to spring back toward the flash pan and the now-exposed powder. As with a flintlock musket, the explosion of the powder in the pan would pass through the touch hole and ignite the powder that had

been loaded into the breech of the gun, propelling the ball outward through the muzzle. The matchlock style of firing mechanism was a constant danger to the soldier because of the burning end of the match cord possibly coming into contact with the black powder being carried or handled.

Of the two styles of firing mechanisms, the matchlock was the oldest and was superseded by the safer flintlock style. It was the flintlock musket that was favored for use by both the American and the British armies during the American Revolutionary War.

The 'Brown Bess' was a flintlock style of musket, but it was specifically a British produced gun. It acquired the name of 'Brown Bess' from the German word *buchse*, meaning 'gun' and the fact that the the stocks of the barrel were painted with walnut wood stain, as compared to the black paint favored by American gunsmiths. It must be remembered that King George III, of German descent, was the first British king to speak any English, so his pronunciation of the word 'buchse' when he spoke of guns with his German accent, sounded like he was saying 'Bess'.



The next meeting of the
Frontier Patriots Chapter
of the Sons of the American Revolution
will be held at the Creekside Inn Restaurant
at 3059 Everett Road, East Freedom, PA
on Saturday, 9 December 2023
starting at 12 Noon.

Well unfortunately the proposed increase in our National dues was approved and everyone saw that increase in the notices we received. We have until December 15 to pay them by sending a check To PASSAR Treasurer Michael Seibert at 105 Bellows Drive, Carlisle, Pa 17015. So please try to pay them by that date to avoid having to pay an additional \$10 to get reinstated. Also if your family has some sort of Christmas celebration, you might consider holding it on December 16, the 250th Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party. Merry Christmas to all my Compatriots.

For those of you that receive this newsletter by US mail, if you have an email address, we would appreciate you informing us of it to use for future newsletters. Printing and mailing these newsletters is not that expensive, but it is time consuming. Please send to our Secretary Larry Smith at schmitt1775@proton.me

Frontier Patriots Chapter website: <https://frontierpatriots.com>