

Virginia Today we are interviewing Chief Elton Greene, Walmore Road, Lewiston, N. Y., member of the Tuscarora Nation. I am Virginia Scipione, Director of the Lewiston Public Library. With us also, is a Library Board member, Betty Phippen. We have had a conversation with Chief Greene and he has outlined basically what he would like to cover today. This is just a beginning. We will turn it over to you, Chief.

C. Greene Thank you. My name is Chief Elton Greene of the Tuscarora Indian Nation. I was born in 1889. I am getting along in years now. I'm getting along pretty fair. I live here - I have been raised here on the Tuscarora Reservation. My grandfather, Elias Johnson, was an historian of Western New York and he has written a book about the Tuscaroras and the Iroquois. The book is out of print now. He was one of the first historians here. And now I am known as an historian. As I have said, the book by Elias Johnson is out of print now and he has told me a lot when I was small of the legends and traditions of what it used to be like in the early days. There is one that is very interesting to everybody about the dwarfs or very small persons. What we call in our language _____ That means a degraded human race. He told me they were about 28 to 30 inches tall and he had seen them lots of times when he was a boy, when he was small. They liked to play around the trees. They liked to fool around with the children and the parents don't like that because they claim that they will give peculiar spirits to the children if they let them fool around them because they are very smart. They have seen their tracks a lot of times on the highways. His mother at night (he used to live in a little log house just a little ways from here and they had a fireplace) said they would climb up there and go thru the chimney. They would come down there during the summer. They would make noise and wake them up and then they would run back up there. They would build a little fire to keep them out. So, at one time when he was telling me this I asked "Where do they come from, have you any idea?" He said, "I was told by my father that they came from the Planet." There is a planet that they live on and they are very smart people. They come down here and they like to play around the Indian people because they have the spirit of their nature and they like to play with the children. He told me he was not the only one who had seen them but a lot around here had seen _____ that come from the Planet. Do you know what? I was listening one time about Science and they say there is a planet that somebody lives on, so it is a curiosity to me how the Indian people knew that there was a people on the planet. After I thought it over, all those early days Indians used to tell us every star, the prominent stars up there, all the names. They knew the names of the stars and what they controlled of the earth. Those Indians had no written language but would go by the stars and the moon, live by that all year round. They knew just what it was from January thru December. I have recorded in my book about the months and so on.

There is another legend I would like to tell you. You have heard a lot about those great big animals and monsters on earth. My grandfather was telling me this. He said there was a legend about those things, too. They were troubled in the early days - he didn't say just when it was - but they were troubled with these great big monstrous animals and there is one that they called _____ dinosaur. There is a great thing about it. They had written on the soft stone what it looks like. It is just the same as what you see now as written. Later on, a few years ago, they discovered some bones in Nebraska of a hip bone giant some 18 feet' long. They were wondering what it was and then they remembered the old saying that there was a monster that lived on this continent. The legend goes like this.

There were three men went out hunting and they were all enjoying themselves. First thing they knew they heard a noise. Something was following them. They turned around and it was that big dinosaur following them. You know how it is - one man can run a little faster than another. So they all started running away. So this one was caught. It took him back and came after another one and while they were running it was no use to have a gun or bow and arrow as it wouldn't do any good. As he was running he came to a little gully with rocks around it and he thought "What will I do now?" He could hear them coming, chasing him. A nice looking man came around the rock, a very nice looking bright young man, and he said, "Where are you going?" He spoke in the Indian language, very good, and he said, "_____". The man answered and said "There is an animal out there that is chasing me. You know it destroys our village, it kills a lot of them, it lives by our blood and by our flesh and we are grieved about it. The young man said "I have been sent by _____". (That means the holder of the heavens or the skies.) I am sent to check this. We have heard your cries. Just stand on that bank over there and see what I can do." He went around the great stone. He came out as a lion with wings. You have seen that picture often times. That came from there. The lion said he was ready to face the monster. They got into a fight. It was a very even fight. The Indian was watching it. How is it going to stop? Then there was a lightning came down and struck the dinosaur and he fell over and the lion won. That lion came back around the stone again as a young man and said, "This is what we have done for you." Everyone on the continent is dead and you go out and tell others to bury every one of those. If you don't bury them all there will be something that will eat your blood. You will be bothered with them off and on in this earth. So tell them you have to cover if you don't want to be bothered. Later on it came down that it must be the mosquitos when they didn't cover all those dinosaurs because off and on we are bothered with something that tastes our blood. That's mosquitos.

Those are some of the legends and it is nice for the children to hear these.

Phippen Chief Greene, we were wondering how the Tuscarora Nation got to this particular area of New York State.

C. Greene The writers of history say that the Tuscaroras were originally in North Carolina. I'm now writing a history of the Tuscaroras and where they came from before they got to N. C. Of course, that will be printed later on. They lived there, a great nation. There were 41 thousand acres in Burdy County in N.C. and they were enjoying themselves until the settlers came around and began to encroach on them. They made friends with the other Indians. It might be interesting for you to know that in the southern part of Kentucky and Virginia and North Carolina - in those days there were no states there - but there were 64 different Indian tribes in that territory clear up to Florida. Those Indians were enemies to different tribes and jealous of each other. We find that early colonists that came there made friends with the Tuscaroras. There were six or seven different tribes with the Tuscaroras but colonists began to make friends with the other tribes to attack the Tuscaroras. They had 500 of the militia under Captain Barnswell and he had 50 militia and he used 500 Indian soldiers to attack the Tuscaroras in North Carolina.

Virginia He was British?

C. Greene Yes, he was British. We find in 1710 the beginning of the wars. That great war lasted until 1713 and that's how we lost the battle at that time and some of them were sold into slavery and shipped south, across the river, and so on. There were some Tuscarora Chiefs there. Tom Blunt, a Sacham Chief, and Chief Toffdick - those two chiefs - are the ones that took the band of the Tuscarora tribe and went into the North Carolina mountains. They were traders from the Tuscaroras and then there were some chiefs in N.C. that fought thru the battle and after the war the Oneidas and Onondagas said "Come back to us."

They used to go back and forth out there. So they started out. According to the legend, almost 200 souls came out on the first trip in 1713 and traveled thru Maryland and blazed the way (marked which way they had gone) and came to Pennsylvania into the Oneida. They settled part of Pennsylvania, then the Oneidas. They settled there. They were welcomed and the other group kept on coming to them and they gave them 1900 acres to reside. They were enjoying themselves and the Revolutionary War came. George Washington came to the Iroquois Confederacy. He said "This is my war. I want you to stay neutral." I can see why. In those days the British were very weak. So was George Washington very weak. The Iroquois Confederacy was stronger than either of the two. Wherever they would join, they would win. That is the reason why he said, "Stay neutral; this is my war. Let me settle this."

Virginia Washington wanted to fight the British without Indians on either side.

C. Greene Yes, and that was alright enough. But it was near the Oneidas reservation that we find the Oneidas and Tuscaroras decided to join George Washington, so they broke away from the Confederacy for that period. So they joined and George Washington made good friends with them.

Virginia It was only the Oneidas and Tuscaroras?

C. Greene Yes. The others all stayed neutral until the British got into their reservation. They took their corn and everything and they promised that they would take care of them. In fact, they were compelled to help the British. In some of the histories, you see, they say they were with the British. They were but they were compelled, forced into it. You can read a lot of history and some is just guessing. Right after the war the Oneidas sold their land to the State of New York, so we find also the Onondagas. The Oneidas also sold the Tuscarora territory so, they didn't get anything for that. So there they were after the war in 1779 or something like that with no place to go. The Seneca Nation began to travel west. They said, "We have a large territory out west. We will give you a portion of land there." So the Tuscaroras had no more home in the Oneidas and they traveled.

I will tell at this time about the history I know about the custom of the Iroquois Confederacy. From the early, early days before the white man came here a descendant of a Mohawk, made up the Confederacy, a peace treaty between them. And there on it is the woman - the nation will go by the woman's side. Whatever the woman is, so are her children. So from there on what they picked up from Oneidas - their children have to be Oneidas. The one that picked up from the Onondagas came down here and they gave them a portion on top of the Indian Hill. That's quite an historic place there. We find that on the woman's side - I married that descendant of Onondaga. My wife was a registered Onondaga and her children are Onondaga. It has to go on the mother's side. That is how we keep our tribe. I think that is how we know just who is our relation. They can't inter-marry into another clan, you see. My wife's clan was eel clan, so all her children are eel clan. I'm a sand turtle clan but you see it stops there.

Virginia No more sand turtles through you?

C. Greene That's the end of it. There are other sand turtles, of course. Each clan has two chiefs. One is a Sachem and one is a substitute. We find then this is how it has been keeping up. Let me tell you one thing. When one died by the name of he was Sachem of the Bear clan and it was brought back to the Bear Clan women to choose another one in his place. Before they choose I'll tell you what happened. I have been Chief on this reservation for 17 years and there was brought before the chief a man. He was turned down because he had a criminal record. We don't have any criminal record for a chief. He was brought in by the clan mother in to the Chief's council. She introduced him. She said, "We have selected this man to take the place of the Sachem and his name is Walter Allen Printup - Marjorie's husband. He was a young man. He was superintendant of the Sunday School and led a very clean life. Without a question he was accepted. The custom is we can't perform our own ceremonies here. That has to go thru the Six Nation Confederacy. When the lady presented his name, she left the name to the Chiefs. We are

-5-

the ones who took that man out to the Tonawanda and the Onondaga to take the place of the Sachem. It was very interesting. The Seneca nation is the Headquarters of the Six Nation Confederacy.

Virginia Onondaga is not any more?

C. Greene Oh, yes, it has chiefs yet. They had a Six Nation Council there last Saturday. When they got him there they examined him. They accepted him and they set the date of the condolence. They have a condolence. There were three or four chiefs at that time. After the condolence he became the Chief of the Tuscarora Nation representing the Bear Clan.

It might be interesting to know that George Washington adopted some of the Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy and this is one of them.

You will notice that you have representatives here - Senators, Congressmen. He is a representative from here, yet he is in the Congress for the whole United States. The Chiefs represent each clan in the chief's council and at the same time when he is in the council he is Chief of the Nation.

Virginia He has to have a larger view for the good of the whole.

C. Greene That's right. The Chief of the Onondaga will tell him. It has to be interpreted. The whole condolence is in Indian language.

Virginia The Condolence is a question period that he has to go through with the chiefs to prove himself worthy?

C. Greene Yes, but a Condolence is an all day affair. First it is in condolence for the dead chief. Then the new man comes in. He was presented in there again before the Chief Council. Then he stands there and the chief tells him what he has to watch, what he has to be, and so on. He tells him his skin shall be as thick as seven spans (from tip of the finger to other tip of the finger). That means that all the difficulties shall not discourage him.

Virginia So it is a real preparation.

C. Greene It is. Then right after we have a feast - beef and Indian bread.

Virginia Even the menu is traditional.

C. Greene Yes. Then we smoke the peace pipe. It's a clay pipe. Then the dance, rejoicing. A new Chief has been set up.

We allow a few to come in but they have to stay at the back. It used to be we did not allow any white people

-6-

to go in. Now we let them come in but they take the back seat. They can see that we still carry on the ancient traditions of the Iroquois Confederacy. It is a very striking thing to understand those things. We still carry on.

We were losing our Indian language. It came to a point where just a few understood the Indian language, the Tuscarora language. You know the Six Nations all have different languages. When I went to school (this would be 74 years ago) the first time I went to school in a little Indian school here and we were forbidden to talk our Indian language and that is all I understood. I didn't even know Yes or No. There were five of us like that. The others understood a little. They watched when we went to recess. It was Albany that forbid the Indian language in the Indian schools.

Virginia Who was your teacher?

C. Greene Her name was Nellie Henry. She was in some school, maybe high school. She was a Tuscarora. I was eleven years old then. You see that was the beginning of losing our language. The Baptist Church in the early days used to preach in Tuscarora. After a while it was mixed English and Tuscarora. Then it was all English. When I preached in the 1920s I had to speak English. I preached until 1939.

I tell you what happened then. In 1961 we had a hearing in Albany before the Senate. I was there. I complained that we were robbed of our own Indian language and they had tried to rob us of our Indian culture. Now, we want it back! We don't want to lose our language, culture or customs. When you lose those things you are no more Indians. They decided at that time to look into it. A few years after, they decided O.K. they would teach it again. At that same time I recommended a very good teacher of Tuscarora because that is all we talk is Tuscarora here. It went through the chief's Council here. They recommended her to be the teacher and Albany accepted. They not only accepted the language here in Albany but it went all over the country. Each nation has the right to teach their own language - Mohawk language, Seneca language - they all have that right now. It even went to universities. It went to Yale University. They opened up the six languages there.

There was a young lady that wanted to learn Tuscarora. She was sent here. Marjory was on summer vacation. So I said "I'll teach her." She stayed in Lewiston with Mrs. Reichert and once a week I went and taught her. She is writing a book now but I told her it wasn't complete.

Virginia What is her name?

Chief Greene Marion Methahon.

My grandson was going to Niagara University. He wanted to take Tuscarora language. They said they didn't teach

-7-

it. He said it should be taught and he wrote to Albany and they said "Yes, they would get a teacher to teach it."

Virginia He would get credit - what's his name?

C. Greene Osborne, Lowell. He is not going to school now. He tried to get a job.

Virginia Has he learned any of the Tuscarora?

C. Greene Just a little bit.

Virginia The best way to learn a language is to live with the people that use it.

Chief Greene Marjory teaches the language to about 30 children and they are beginning to speak the language (Tuscarora) to each other now. The parents are now learning from their own children. There are just about 5 or 6 families that understand on the reservation.
