

Windsor History

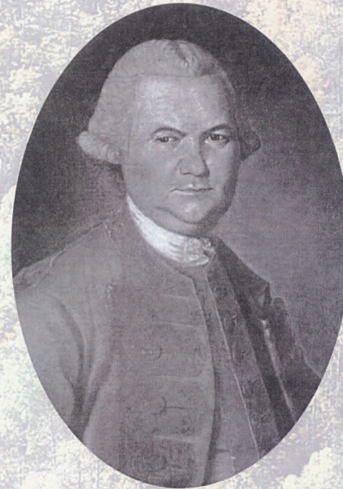
*Early Valley History of the 1700's
From the Iroquois of Onaquaga to the Earliest White Settlers*

Trading Comes to the Ancient Indian Village of Onaquaga

LONG BEFORE the Town of Windsor was settled in the early 1800's, the Iroquois had lived in this valley of the Susquehanna River for hundreds of years in the Indian village of Onaquaga at the base of Onaquaga Mountain several miles north of present day Windsor. Artifacts have been found here dating back to the pre-historic Transition Period, or about 1200 BC. The first white men to come upon Onaquaga were probably Dutch traders who in the 1600's made a map of the interior of what would become New York state that clearly shows the existence of the settlement—spelled on the map “Ogehage”. There are numerous spellings of Onaquaga, most of them meaning “Place of Hulled Corn Soup” or “Place of Wild Grapes”. Today, we know it by the name Onaquaga.

The Onaquagans of the 18th Century were primarily of the Oneida Nation. But Onaquaga was also a crossroads melting pot along the upper Susquehanna River, being described as a place where many Iroquois who were in disagreement with the politics of their villages were in the habit of settling. The Tuscarora arrived at Onaquaga in 1715, one year after being accepted as the Sixth Iroquois nation. They had settlements north and south of the main village.

In 1739, Sir William Johnson, years prior to becoming the first Superintendent of Indian Affairs in New York state, established a fur trading post at Onaquaga. He saw great promise in this venture as there was an absence of trade competition in the south central lands of Iroquoia. Well situated on the Susquehanna River, Onaquaga rewarded Johnson by enabling him to become the most successful trader in the province. In return, Johnson was a strong ally of the Iroquois, fighting for their needs and interests until his untimely death in 1774.



Sir William Johnson
Portrait by Matthew Pratt of Sir William Johnson, first Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the Colonies. Johnson established a trading post at Onaquaga in 1739. —Courtesy of Johnson Hall.



Picture of diorama by Foster Disinger, past president of the Broome County Historical Society, of Onaquaga at the time of Rev. Hawley's arrival in 1753. The “long-house” was the characteristic dwelling of the Iroquois Nations. —Courtesy of the Broome County Historical Society

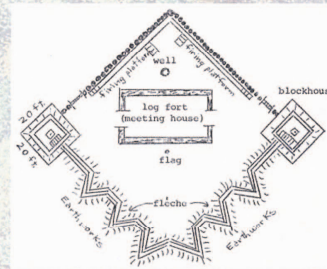


Diagram by Ward Barton of the interior of the Old Fort based on a description of it in a recorded statement made by 78-year-old Luther M. Smith in 1908.



Painting by Windsor artist Bill Grausgruber depicting the Old Fort at Onaquaga, built by the British in 1756 to provide protection for the Native people during a war with the French and Delaware Indians.

The Many Spellings of Onaquaga

Onaquaga has at least several dozen spellings. Sir William Johnson wrote it as Aughquagey; for the Rev. Gideon Hawley it was Onahouquage; Mohawk Chief Joseph Brant spelled it Oahkwaga; and the early settlers gave it the spelling of Oquago. Today, it is written as Onaquaga.

Aughquagey, Onahouquage, Oahkwaga, Oquago, Onaquaga



1755 map of the Onaquaga Valley by the Rev. Gideon Hawley, then head of the Mission Station at the Iroquois village. Rev. Hawley estimated the population of Onaquaga was around 220 at the time. —Courtesy of the Congregational Library, Boston, Massachusetts