

Founding Schaghticoke and Odanak

by Marge Bruchac



This artistic rendering of the Wôbanaki settlement on the Arsikantegouk (Saint Francis River) depicts wooden frame houses, bark wigwams, a small Catholic church, and the beginnings of a military stockade, circa 1690. Illustration copyright Frank Gregory.

Shifting Homesites in the Connecticut River Valley

For millennia, the [Wôbanaki](#) peoples along the [Quinneticook](#) (Connecticut) River and its tributaries lived in overlapping [homelands](#) while harvesting various natural resources through the seasons. They hunted as far north as southern Canada in the fall and fished together at the falls of the Quinneticook and [Pocumtuck](#) (Deerfield) rivers in spring. They traveled with their relatives and allies and gathered together for ceremonial and diplomatic occasions. (To learn more, see the explanation [Native Land Use and Settlements in the Northeastern Woodlands](#).)

The tribal names they were known by came from the Algonkian locative terms for settlements centered on planting fields close to the river: [Agawam](#), [Nonotuck](#), [Pocumtuck](#), [Quaboag](#) (near the Swift River), [Sokoki](#), and [Woronoco](#) (near the Westfield River).

After 1630, long-standing traditional patterns of Native settlement and relationships in this valley were disrupted when Europeans arrived in the Connecticut River Valley. At first, English fur traders offered what seemed like a useful arrangement that would provide new goods and secure new English allies. (See the historic scene on this site: "Trade and Alliance" > "Trading at Springfield.")

Soon, the spread of disease and inter-tribal conflict, the increasing threat of European encroachment, and the need to concentrate supplies of food, furs, and ammunition for trade caused the Agawam, Nonotuck, Pocumtuck, and Sokoki people to construct at least five different fortified sites along the Connecticut River. During this same time period, William Pynchon and his son, John, negotiated a series of Indian deeds (1) to secure the most desirable farming and settlement lands for English colonists. (To learn more, see the map [Settlement Patterns in the Connecticut River Valley](#).)

Indian forts were restrictive places to live, and offered little protection in the long run. (2) By 1675, political injustices and the loss of land inspired the valley's Native peoples to abandon the forts, and join forces with the [Wampanoag](#), [Nipmuc](#) and [Narragansett](#) during [Metacom's War](#) (King Philip's War). This rebellion proved as devastating to Native peoples as it was to the English. (See the historic scene on this site: "Assault on Peskeompskut.")



After the war, some of the valley's Native families continued to live in their old home sites, as others withdrew into less-populated places to resist further encroachment by the English. Between the 1670s and 1750s, the need for more secure settlements led many Native families to move north into Wôbanaki territory. Some joined the [Missisquoi](#), [Cowass](#), or [Pennacook](#) people in present-day Vermont and New Hampshire, or went to the Catholic Wôbanaki village of Norridgewock in western Maine. A few families joined the [Kanienkaha](#) (Mohawk) at [Kahnawake](#), or sought temporary refuge with the [Mohican](#) of the Hudson River Valley. Some families relocated several times during this time period. (To learn more, see the explanation [Native Diaspora and New Communities: Algonkian and Wôbanaki](#).)

The survival of the Connecticut River Valley's Native peoples was dependent, in large part, on two key places of refuge. One was [Schaghticoke](#), located in New York state, about 60 miles west of Deerfield and 16 miles north of Albany, at the confluence of the [Hoosic](#) and Tomhannock Rivers, close by the Hudson River.

Wôbanaki territory was so large that it was relatively easy for Native peoples in New England to move out of reach of English settlements and yet still be among their close allies. Copyright Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Deerfield, MA. All Rights Reserved.

The other was [Odanak](#) (Saint Francis), located about 200 miles north of the valley, above Montreal on the Arsikantegouk (Saint Francis River), just southeast of the St. Lawrence.

English settlers hoped that the Agawam, Nonotuck, Pocumtuck, Quaboag, Sokoki, and Woronoco had left the valley for good, but that was not the case. The records of their movements after 1676 are confusing only because colonial leaders assigned new names to these Native people based on wherever they happened to be living at the time. The French and English began calling them "Schaghticokes," "North Indians," "Loups," "River Indians," "Saint Francis Indians," and other terms that obscured their original tribal identities. (3) Today, many of their direct descendants can be found among the Wôbanaki peoples of northern New England and southern Canada, still living near the places where their ancestors found refuge in the 1700s.

Seeking Refuge at Schaghticoke

Schaghticoke, New York, was situated in what had long been traditional [Mohican](#) Indian territory, but it had become part of the New York colony after the fall of New Netherland in 1664, and was now under the protection of the Kanienkehaka. The place name of "Schaghticoke" came from the Algonkian word "pishgoch-tigoch," which indicated a place "where two rivers come together." (The Native residents of this refugee village should not be confused with the [Schaghticoke Tribe](#), who live on the Housatonic River in Connecticut.) (4)

It was May of 1676, just after the attack at Peskeompskut, when New York's colonial Governor, [Edmund Andros](#), first invited the Pocumtuck and other Connecticut River Valley Indians, to move to Schaghticoke. (5) Andros's offer was actually more strategic than humanitarian, since Schaghticoke was conveniently located near the Hudson River and close to Albany. Andros knew of the close ties among Wôbanaki people, and he assumed that the Schaghticoke Indians would provide a buffer to prevent the [Saint Francis Abenaki](#) from attacking the English settlements around Albany.

Oral traditions relate that Andros held a meeting called a "Witenagemot" (a peace council) with Albany's magistrates, ministers and Native leaders. Sachems from the Kanienkehaka, Mohican, and Connecticut River Valley jointly planted an oak tree to serve as a symbolic "tree of peace" to protect the Schaghticoke Indian settlement. (6)

During the fall of 1676, John Pynchon of Springfield, observed that more than 200 Native families from Agawam, Nonotuck, Pocumtuck, and Woronoco were leaving Massachusetts to go to Schaghticoke. (7) Soon, the Mohican people still living at Schaghticoke were completely outnumbered by Native people from the Connecticut River Valley. The newcomers built small family wigwams and larger bark lodges, and cleared and planted maize fields, just as they had in the Connecticut River Valley. They continued using their traditional [homelands](#), traveling eastward to present-day Shelburne Falls on the Deerfield River for spring salmon fishing, and gathering medicinal plants and other local resources. They went northward in winter to hunt on the lower Winooski River on the east side of Lake Champlain, and to trade with the Missisquoi and other Wôbanakiak.

The Schaghticoke people lived under English protection, but the colonial documents make it clear that they governed themselves. When conflicts with Albany residents arose, the Mohican sachems would often intervene on their behalf. Soquans (Pocumtuck), Wamsachko (Sokoki), Shattoockquis (Pocumtuck and Quaboag), and Gray Lock (Woronoco) were some of the more prominent sachems at Schaghticoke. Although these men had left Massachusetts, the Schaghticoke sachems were still expected to intercede whenever troubles arose between the English and Native peoples in the Connecticut River Valley.

Schaghticoke was an important economic rendezvous for hunters and traders coming from the rich beaver hunting territory in the Adirondack Mountains to connect with the water routes on the Hudson River and the land trails into New England. For several decades, the peace and steady trade among the Schaghticoke, Kanienkehaka, Mohican, and the English allowed everyone living in the area to prosper.

The Native people living at Schaghticoke kept up steady communications with Connecticut River Valley families who had moved to other places, and New York's governors sent periodic gifts of wampum to encourage more Wôbanaki people to leave off their friendship with the French and join them. In 1685, the population increased dramatically after the Pocumtuck/Quaboag sachem Shattoockquis (also known as Sadochques), who had earlier relocated to Odanak, was persuaded to bring about 50 families of Connecticut River Valley people to Schaghticoke. (8) What none of the Schaghticoke leaders knew, however, was that New York's colonial leaders were already maneuvering with Mohican and Kanienkehaka leaders to purchase Schaghticoke lands for English settlement. (9)



By the 1650, the beaver population in the middle Connecticut River Valley had dropped dramatically, but the hunting in the Adirondacks was still plentiful. Copyright Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Deerfield, MA. All Rights Reserved.

Founding the Abenaki Nation at Odanak

The village of Saint François, or Saint Francis, founded around 1670 by Sokoki people from central New England, was situated on the Arsikantegouk River just south of the St. Lawrence River, about 40 miles above Montreal. The name Arsikantegouk (meaning "empty cabin river" or "place of shells") came from two events: a 1691 attack by the Kaniienkehaka on French settlers, and a plague that hit the Abenaki village around 1700. The Wôbanakiak more commonly call the place "Odanak," which means "at the dwelling-place."

In 1638, the French settlers of New France named the river for François de Lauzon who was given seignorial rights by the French crown. The surrounding territory was called Saint-François-du-Lac, since it bordered on Lac Saint-Pierre, and the first Catholic parish there was named Saint-François-Xavier. After the French Jesuit mission on the Chaudière River, Saint-François-de-Sales, moved to Odanak in 1700, the town and region came to be simply called "Saint Francis." The Abenaki village had come under the protection of the French after Marguerite Hertel ceded some land granted her by the crown to provide a larger refuge for the Wôbanaki who were among New France's key allies.

The first group of Connecticut River Valley Indians to head north after Metacom's War were a group of Sokoki families who moved to Wolinak (near the French villages of Trois Rivières and Bécancœur), about 40 miles north of Odanak. Sokoki people also went to Odanak and to Ville-Marie (Montreal). Wôbanaki families frequently went back and forth among these locations. The Wôbanaki village of Missisquoi, situated along the eastern shore of Lake Champlain, was another key place of refuge. For some, it was a stopping point on the way to Odanak; for others, it became a new home. [\(10\)](#)

Life at Odanak was a mixture of lifeways, including traditional seasonal travels for hunting and fishing, concentrated planting fields near the river, and extensive trading with the French for goods and supplies. During the winter, families would break into smaller bands for hunting and trapping at a distance. Native people at Odanak lived in both bark wigwams and French frame houses, and used Native leather, bark, clay and fur materials, alongside woolen cloth, metal tools, and various other goods and ornaments provided through the fur trade.

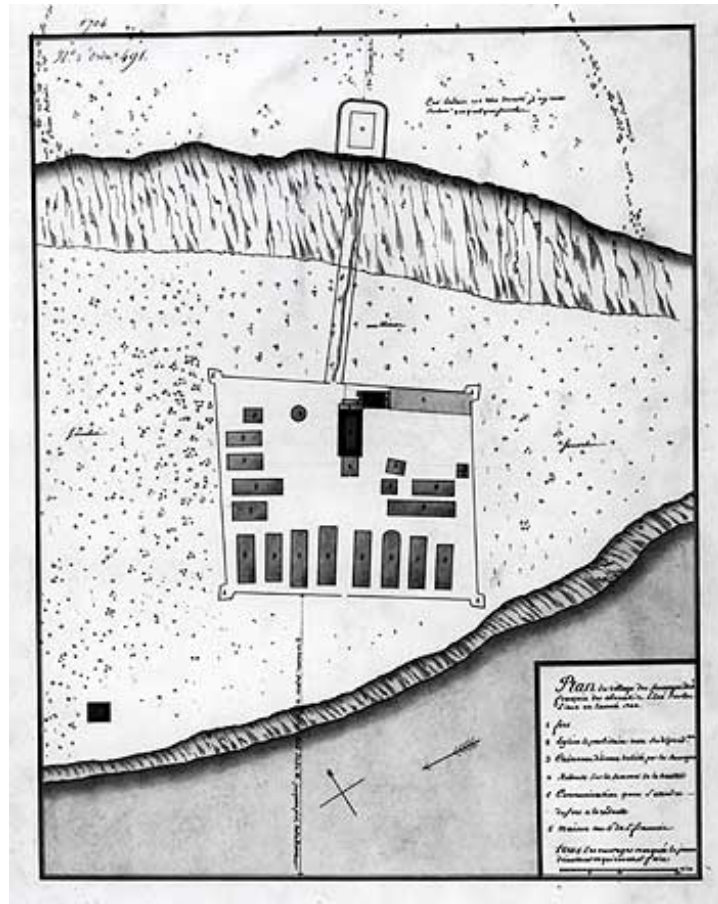
There was a Catholic church at Odanak, staffed by a Jesuit priest who incorporated the Abenaki language into the text and hymns, in an attempt to both accommodate the spiritual needs of Wôbanaki people and encourage conversions. [\(11\)](#) While some accepted Catholicism, others maintained traditional Native practices and beliefs that have persisted to the present day.



This 18th century French illustration demonstrates the mixture of French and Native dress that was typical of Wobanaki people, who combined trade goods like linen chemises and wool blankets with indigenous deerskin leggings and decorative markings.

Over time, many considerations drew Native families to Odanak, not the least of which were pre-existing kinship ties, and broad diplomatic alliances among the Canadian Algonkian and Iroquoian Nations. These alliances included the [Wôbanaki Confederacy](#) (among Eastern and Western Abenaki peoples), the [Seven Nations Alliance](#) (among Iroquoian and Algonkian villages, around the St. Lawrence, and the 1701 [Great Peace of Montreal](#) (including 30 nations of Iroquoian and Algonkian peoples across Canada and the French). (See the historic scene on this site: "Great Peace of 1701".)

The similarities among Catholic Indians in New France, their ties to the French, and their common grievances against the English helped to make these alliances very strong. The alliance with the French provided military support as well as trade and protection. By 1704, a French military-style stockade was constructed at Odanak, and French families and soldiers were at times in residence alongside Wôbanaki families.



In 1704, the French assisted the Wobanaki in constructing a military-style fortification with corner bastions around the village of Odanak, which had expanded to include 14 large bark lodges, built to house multiple families, in addition to the church. Courtesy National Archives of Canada.

stay, and asked them to help guard against French and Indian attacks, but he also sent to Connecticut for additional English militia. (12) A year later, New York's Governor Thomas Dongan persuaded some Native people from Schaghticoke to move south to Half Moon to better protect Albany. Many found the dependence on the English too stifling. In 1699, a number of Native families left Schaghticoke to hunt beaver in the Abenaki territory around the Winooski River, claiming they were fearful of the English. (13)

The Albany Commissioners attempted to convince more Wôbanaki people to move to Schaghticoke, hoping to break their alliance with the French. For a time, they almost succeeded. By 1702, there were more than 1,000 Native people living at Schaghticoke, and the sachem Soquans declared that the tree of peace was

By 1704, at least 300 of the Native people known collectively as "Saint Francis" Indians were those who had originally come from Wôbanaki homelands in central and northern New England. It should be no surprise that so many of them were willing to join in the attack on Deerfield.

Pressure to Leave Schaghticoke

The English expected the Schaghticoke Indians to monitor the movements of all Native people through New York and New England, which was an impossible task. In 1690, the Saint Francis Abenaki and Kahnawake Kanienkehaka attacked nearby Schenectady, killing 60 English settlers, and taking 27 captives. Suspicion naturally fell upon the Schaghticoke.

The leaders of the Massachusetts, Connecticut and Plymouth colonies had refused to negotiate with the local Indians in 1676, but in 1690, they suddenly changed their tune. Following New York's lead, the New England colonies began offering shelter to any Native people who would agree to live peaceably among the English. Some of the Schaghticoke refugees took up the offer so they could return to their homelands.

In the fall of 1690, about 150 Pocumtuck people moved back to Deerfield and asked for John Pynchon's protection. Pynchon begrudgingly allowed them to

symbolically so strong and "grown so thick of leaves & Bows that the sun can scarce shine throw it, yea the fire itself cannot consume it, meaning that they are now so strong, that they do not much fear the enemy." (14)

Despite their strength, it was becoming all too clear that the Connecticut River Valley Indians living at Schaghticoke were about to be forced off their lands in New York, just as they had been forced out of their original homelands in Massachusetts. The lush maize fields at Schaghticoke were proving to be too great a temptation to resist, and English colonists began demanding use of the Native lands at Schaghticoke.

In 1699, the town of Albany purchased a six mile square tract of Schaghticoke Indian land from a Dutch broker, Hendrick van Rennselear, who had secured a crown patent years earlier. When Albany's leaders negotiated a deed for an additional two mile by six mile tract, they paid the Schaghticoke with 2 blankets, 12 coats, 20 shirts, 2 guns, ammunition and an assortment of alcohol. Drunkenness soon became a serious problem at Schaghticoke. More deeds would soon follow.

Over the course of the eight decades that the refugee village of Schaghticoke was under New York colony's protection, more than 2,000 Native people from the Connecticut River Valley sought refuge there. Equal, if not greater numbers came and went from Odanak, Missisquoi, Cowass, Pennacook, and other northern Wôbanaki communities.

By 1704, some Native families began leaving Schaghticoke to move north, where the colonial documents then identify them as generic "Saint Francis Abenaki Indians." In this same time period, other Native people, such as [Wattanummon](#), grew disenchanted with French Catholicism, and moved back to Schaghticoke. Although the name "Schaghticoke Indians" does not appear on the list of those responsible for the 1704 attack on Deerfield, it is clear that many Connecticut River Valley Indians, by way of Schaghticoke, were in residence at Odanak while the attack was being planned. (For further discussion, see [Schaghticoke and Points North: Wôbanaki Resistance and Persistence](#).)

FOOTNOTES

Footnote # 1

Although many Native signers specifically reserved rights to continue to plant, fish, hunt, and live on the lands supposedly "sold," there is little evidence that the English paid much attention or respect to these rights.

Footnote # 2

For example, in 1663, attacks by the Kanienkehaka (Mohawk) and their Iroquois allies damaged the Sokoki fort. Later that same year, with assistance of several English fur traders, the Pocumtuck hosted a peace conference at their fort with 36 of the Sokoki sachems and several emissaries from the Kanienkehaka and Mohican. But by 1664, the English had formed a new alliance with the Kanienkehaka, Mohican, and all of the Hudson River tribes, who agreed to assist each other in any conflicts against the Connecticut River Valley Indians. In early February of 1665, the Kanienkehaka attacked and destroyed the Pocumtuck fort.

Footnote # 3

Historical errors about the origins of Schaghticoke and Odanak abound in the writings of 19th century historians and secondary sources. These errors are linguistic and geographical as well as historical in nature. The most common mistakes are the following: assuming that the Schaghticoke Indians in New York were all Mohican; confusing the Schaghticoke Indians in New York with the Schaghticoke Tribe in Connecticut; confusing the Pequot in Connecticut with the Pennacook in New Hampshire; confusing the Mohican in New York with the Mohegan in Connecticut; confusing the Cowass in Vermont with the place name Cohoes in New York; mistaking the Saco Indians of Maine for the Sokoki Indians of the Connecticut River Valley; assuming that Odanak was a place of origin for all of the Abenaki people of Vermont and New Hampshire; and mixing up Eastern Abenaki and Western Abenaki. These mistaken identities have all encouraged the mistaken impression that the middle Connecticut River Valley Indians and other Wôbanaki peoples disappeared.

Primary documents of the 1600s and 1700s often used generic identifiers such as "North Indians," "River Indians," "Schaghticoke," "St. Francis Indians" etc. rather than calling these Native people by their original tribal names, and that the definition of these terms changed over time. Gordon Day's work *The Identity of the Saint Francis Indians* (1981) is an excellent source for untangling the various Native tribes who came and went from Odanak, but there is not, as yet, any comparable source for the histories of those who came and went from Schaghticoke.

Footnote # 4

Many historians have been confused by the fact that there were two different Native settlements by this name during the 1600s. In 1637, a group of Native people, many of whom were Pequot, formed the core group of a Native village called "Schaghticoke," situated in northwestern Connecticut along the Housatonic River; those people make up the Schaghticoke Tribe today. Decades later, in 1676, a large number of Connecticut River Valley Indians from Massachusetts relocated to an entirely different place, also called "Schaghticoke," situated at what had formerly been an exclusively Mohican village site in New York state, on the Hoosic River. The two Schaghticoques were culturally similar, but their histories and founding populations were dramatically different.

Footnote # 5

Governor Andros' letter of May 1676 reads, in part, as follows:

Also send by some Mahicander [a message to the] Eastward. . . that all Indyans, who will come & submit, shall be received to live under the protection of the Government and that the Governor will be as afore, where any of them may freely come and speake with him and return againe, as they see cause without Molestation... (NYCD XIII:497).

Footnote # 6

The oak tree was planted on the south side of the Hoosic River, on lands that were later absorbed into the farm of Johannes Knickerbocker. The Knickerbocker family cemetery, on the grounds of the farm, was superimposed upon the existing cemetery from the Schaghticoke settlement. Local historian Grace Greylock Niles wrote a compelling book, *Hoosac Valley: Its Legends and Its History* (1912), that includes some important Native oral traditions about the Schaghticoke settlement, but it consistently misidentifies many of the tribal nations involved, and liberally mixes fact and fiction. She does, however, reference the fact that a Native woman known as "Queen Esther," a member of the Akwesasne (St. Regis) Kanienkehaka, who was a direct descendant of the Pocumtuck sachem Soquans, made regular visits back to Schaghticoke until the 1860s.

Footnote # 7

An August 26, 1676 letter from John Pynchon reads in part as follows:

...the enemy who we certainly understand are gathered together at Paquaog on the Hudson River about 200 men and having there wives and children (John Pynchon Papers 1:170).

Footnote # 8

The exchange between Sadochques, who is identified in earlier English records as Shattoockquis, took place during a July 1, 1685 conference. Sadochques knew that the French King would miss them, but stated that he felt a closer kinship with the Native peoples at Schaghticoke than he did with the French. During a lengthy exchange of wampum and beaver furs, after securing the safety of his own people, Sadochques also asked New York's Governor Thomas Dongan to allow some Mohican people who were then living among the Saint Francis Abenaki to return to the Hudson River Valley (see *Livingston Records*, Leder 1956:77-81).

In August 4, 1685, an invitation was extended to Connecticut River Valley refugees then living at Pennacook to relocate to Schaghticoke as well (see *Livingston Records*, Leder 1956:82).

Footnote # 9

Robert Livingston, Albany's Secretary for Indian Affairs, promised that all of the Indians at Schaghticoke would be:

Protected, & Civilly used, & have Land Eneough to Plant upon...ye Path being open for all Indians yt are willing to come and live Peaceably under this government (see *Livingston Records*, Leder 1956:77-81).

Livingston was however, at that moment, already maneuvering to purchase 2,000 acres of Mohican land that would soon be converted into the 160,000 acre Manor of Livingston. More deeds for Schaghticoke Indian land would soon follow.

Footnote # 10

Native people at Odanak were routinely fluent in several languages – French, Kanienkehaka, and English – in addition to the different Wôbanaki dialects. Missisquoi families had so many direct kinship ties with Odanak, that the Missisquoi dialect known today as Western Abenaki became the dominant language of the Saint Francis Indians.

Footnote # 11

In 1691, the Saint Francis Abenaki sent a wampum belt to the cathedral at Chartres as a token of their welcome for the Jesuits. A painting of that belt occupies an honored place in the church at Odanak today, as does a small replica of the Chartres cathedral that was sent over in 1691. The original gift from Chartres was stolen from the church in 1759 during Roger's Raid.

Footnote # 12

John Pynchon seems to have been caught by surprise by this return of Pocumtuck people carrying passes of safe conduct from the Mayor of Albany. Samuel Partridge reported:

...the Indians that are come down are about 150 of them, men, women, and children, and are settled at Deerfield under the side of the mountain southerly from the town, living in the woods about a mile out of the town, the men plying hunting and leaving their women and children at home. (Partridge, quoted by Pynchon in writing to Massachusetts Governor Simon Bradstreet, December 2, 1691).

John Pynchon was well known to these Indians from his decades of trading furs, serving as a judge, fighting in King Philip's War, and now, reporting to the governors of the New England colonies. Pynchon wrote a set of directions for Partridge to deliver to the Pocumtuck, including the following:

...we shall for the present overlook your seeming intruding upon us, and allow you abiding where you are this winter time, you behaving yourselves peaceably and orderly and carrying it well to all our people...We do particularly caution you to beware of strong drink...We let you know that we are now apprehensive of some approach of the French and Indian enemy and therefore intend to keep out scouts, and to have more strict watch, and shortly to settle some more soldiers at Deerfield, wherefore none of you...are to go or wander from your present stations without orders in writing...

The Pocumtuck, who apparently hoped for a more welcoming response, replied that they:

...intend no ill to the English but to carry it peaceably...They desire their squaws may be safe under protection while they are all hunting.

(Bridenbaugh, Carl. The Pynchon Papers, Volume I, Letters of John Pynchon, 1654-1700, Boston, MA: Colonial Society of Massachusetts 1982, p. 236-245).

Footnote # 13

The Winooski River and intervals, east of Lake Champlain near Burlington, Vermont, have long been part of the traditional Winooski and Missisquoi Abenaki territory. When some of the Schaghticoke claimed the region as "where we have formerly dwelt" they identified themselves as members of those tribal groups. The Mohican took the symbolism of the tree of peace, and their protection of the refugees at Schaghticoke, seriously. The sachem Calooleet, who had recently sold Mohican lands on the Hudson River around Albany, accompanied the Schaghticoke who went to Winooski. n June 20, 1699, in a message to Albany's Mayor, Peter Schuyler, Calooleet symbolically referred to the Schaghticoke as "children" when he wrote:

We must tell you there is a great fear among our children, because they have caught but a few Beaver to pay their debts, and when they come home, your people do threaten and strike them for beaver, which may occasion their departure; pray let that no more be done for the future...Last year our corn was scarce by reason of high waters, and what was left, most part thereof your people took from us, which caused our wives [to] suffer for it in Winter...Schaakook has been appointed by all Governors for our dwelling place, where a tree is planted to cover all out people...We would not have you take ill thoughts that we should leave you.

Schuyler was suspicious, having heard that the Schaghticoke at Winnoski were preparing to meet with the Governor of Canada. Although he reassured the Schaghticoke they need not fear their debtors, he interrogated Calooleet and reported the incident to Lieutenant Governor Nanfan. By 1701, the Schaghticoke had returned from Winooski with an assurance of leniency regarding their debts.

Footnote # 14

In 1702, during a conference between Governor of New York and the Schaghticoke, the sachem Soquans stated:

About 26 years ago [1676] Sir Edmund Andros then Governor of this Province planted a Tree of welfare at Skachcook and invited us to come and live there which we luckily complied withall, and we have had the good

fortune ever since that wee have encreased that Tree and the very leaves thereof are grown hard & strong, the Tree is grown so thich of leaves & Bows that the sun can scarce shine throw it, yea the fire itself cannot consume it, meaning that they are now so strong, that they do not much fear the enemy (Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York IV:991).

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