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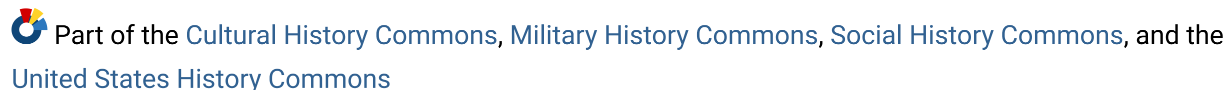
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Keeper of the Western Door

The Life and Legacy of Donehogawa, or Ely Samuel Parker

Senior Project submitted to

The Division of Social Studies

of Bard College

by

Raphael Magnus Lucien Egbert Pierson-Sante

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Introduction

In 1896, Jacob Riis published *Out of Mulberry Street: Stories of Tenement Life in New York City*, a collection of short stories capturing the everyday lives of various New York City residents centered around the eponymous street. Riis, a Danish-American journalist, author, photographer, and "muckraker," had made a name for himself exposing the atrocious living conditions in which the city's poor underclass lived in his photography series titled *How the Other Half Lives*. *Out of Mulberry Street* was intended to build upon Riis's earlier work, using mostly fictitious stories and characters to convey what the photographs could not. Yet amongst all the stories of the squalid tenements, immigrant families, and bustling marketplaces of Lower Manhattan, Riis's typical focus, there was a different sort of story, one which called to mind a different era of American history: an image of a romantic past set against the grimy present, two eras colliding, each as much of a stranger to the other.

"A Dream of the Woods" begins inside the police station on Mulberry Street, as a young messenger boy for the police department dozes off, dreaming of the characters of James Fenimore Cooper's novels and their adventures in the imagined primeval wilderness. He is awakened by the entrance of two strangers: an old woman and a young girl, neither of whom speak any English at all. They are Iroquois, Caughnawaga Mohawks of the St. Regis Reservation in Canada, who had come down to the big city to sell their crafts. Someone was supposed to meet them, but had failed to show up, and the two had been hopelessly stranded in Grand Central Terminal before a police officer escorted them to the station. They spent the night at the station and waited there until the timely arrival of someone who could set things straight.

> General Ely S. Parker was the "big Indian" of Mulberry Street in a very real sense. Though he was a clerk in the Police Department and never went on the

> war-path any more, he was the head of the ancient Indian Confederacy, chief of the Six Nations, once so powerful for mischief, and now a mere name that frightens no one. Donegahawa [sic] –one cannot help wishing that the picturesque old chief had kept his name of the council lodge–was not born to sit writing at an office desk. In youth he tracked the bear and the panther in the Northern woods. The scattered remnants of the tribes East and West owned his rightful authority as chief. The Canaghwagas were one of these. So these lost ones had come straight to the official and actual head of their people when they were stranded in the great city. They knew it when they heard the magic name of Donegahawa, and sat silently waiting and wondering till he should come.[1]

And so, Ely (pronounced *Ee-lee*) S. Parker, Donehogawa, New York police officer and Seneca war chief, arrived. He spoke to them and told them where they needed to go. The grateful pair left the police station for their destination, and "Mulberry Street awoke from its dream of youth, of the fields and the deep woods, to the knowledge that it was a bad day." The dream is over, and the world moves forward.

Riis's work is a product of its time and situation, just as the real Ely S. Parker was. His work, though short, gives a modern reader an understanding of how intellectual Euro-Americans of the late nineteenth century viewed the country's Indigenous population. Romantic, idealized, primitive yet magnificent. They are mostly gone, confined to the past, but when they appear in the present day they do so as a figure of a bygone age, melancholic in nature, a symbol of a spectacular world now lost to history. The way that Riis chose to describe Ely Parker or Donehogawa—sachem, historian, author, law student, civil engineer, soldier, secretary, police officer—merits inclusion. To find out who someone truly was, beyond a dry list of titles and accomplishments easily available to us, it is necessary to take into account how a person sees

[1] Jacob August Riis, "A Dream of the Woods," in *Out of Mulberry Street: Stories of Tenement Life in New York City* (New York: Century, 1896), 73–79.

themself, how they are seen by their contemporaries, and how they are characterized by posterity. Jacob Riis knew Parker well towards the end of his life, and, although his description merits further analysis, his words and insight are valuable.

On September 1st, 1895, one year before Jacob Riis published his story, the New York Times published a sizable obituary detailing the life of a man who had died the previous day. "GEN. ELY S. PARKER DEAD" read the headline, which was captioned, "A Full-Blooded Iroquois Indian with a Remarkable History—Served on Gen. U. S. Grant's Staff—Drew Up the Conditions of Surrender at Appomattox—Refused Citizenship, He Gained It as a Soldier."[2]

The average American of the twenty-first century will likely be relatively familiar with Ulysses S. Grant or Robert E. Lee. Not so with Ely S. Parker. American Civil War historians and those amateur enthusiasts of the period, of which there are many varieties, will be familiar with Parker, or at least one particular incident in his life. New York State historians will likely recognize his name, or the influence of the Parker family more generally. Outside of such specific historical circles, knowledge of Parker among the general non-Native public is almost nonexistent.

Only two full-length biographies of Ely Parker exist: *The Life of General Ely S. Parker: Last Grand Sachem of the Iroquois and General Grant's Military Secretary* written by Arthur Caswell Parker in 1919 and *Warrior in Two Camps: Ely S. Parker, Union General and Seneca Chief* written by William Howard Armstrong in 1978. The Public Broadcasting service released *Warrior in Two Worlds* in 1999, a nearly hour-long film documenting Parker's life and legacy. Cultural depictions of Ely Parker are few and far between. Perhaps most notable is in the 2012 film *Lincoln*, where actor Asa-Luke Twocrow portrays Parker in a silent background role,

[2] "GEN. ELY S. PARKER DEAD." *New York Times* (1857-1922), September 1, 1895.

appearing at the side of Jared Harris's Ulysses S. Grant in several scenes.[3] He also appears in the 2020 History Channel documentary miniseries *Grant*, where an uncredited actor speaking a single line reenacts the famous exchange between Parker and Robert E. Lee at the McLean House in Appomattox.

To understand the man, Donehogawa and Ely Parker, and the two worlds in which he lived, some contextual information is necessary. It is not possible to get a clear picture of his accomplishments and his personality without knowing the circumstances and the culture in which he was raised. Central to any discussion of Ely Parker must be his nephew, Arthur Caswell Parker. Arthur Parker (1881-1955), the grandson of Ely's brother Nicholson, had a distinguished career as an archaeologist, ethnologist, and historian employed by the State of New York, greatly expanding public knowledge of the Iroquois people through his own independent research. He was also committed to the legacy of his illustrious uncle, and published the first biography of Ely Parker in 1919. *The Life of General Ely S. Parker* is one of the main sources for this paper. Many of Arthur Parker's sources were taken from first-hand accounts and his own family knowledge, providing an invaluable and impossible to replicate source of information. Yet it is also for these reasons that his work, though referred to extensively over the course of this essay, must be examined critically. Like many young men of the period who wrote biographies of their famous relatives, Parker had an interest in maintaining his uncle's legacy. His 1919 work lies somewhere between a primary and a secondary source. It will be used straightforwardly as a source in many instances, but attention will be paid to Arthur Parker's viewpoints and sources. Any discussion of Ely Parker must necessarily be a discussion of Arthur Parker as well, for reasons that will become apparent later in this paper.

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[3] "Lincoln (2012) - IMDb," IMDb, n.d., https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0443272/fullcredits?ref_=tt_cl_sm.

Chapter 1: The League and the Council Fire

The tribal confederation known variously as the Iroquois or Haudenosaunee Confederacy was originally made up of five distinct tribes whose lands cover the western part of the present-day State of New York. These were the Seneca, the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Cayuga, and the Onondaga. The Tuscarora, who had migrated into Iroquois territory from farther south, were admitted as the sixth nation in 1722.[4] The Five Nations, and later Six Nations, were one of the largest and most powerful political and cultural entities in northeastern North America. For the sake of simplicity, the author will use the terms "Iroquois" and "Six Nations" for the duration of this work.

The founding of the Five Nations, the League, or the Confederacy has its beginnings shrouded in myth.[5] It should be noted that there is no centrally accepted tradition, instead varying based on tribe, era, and nation, and the existing scholarly interpretation is equally disparate. Sometime between circa 1400 and 1600, the Seneca, Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, and Onondaga were stuck in a perpetual cycle of war and violence, devastating tribes and families. According to the story, one man, Hiawatha, was distraught after suffering the loss of his three daughters (or granddaughters) and took to the forest in his rage and sorrow. In the woods, or in a Mohawk village, he met Deganawida, also known as the Great Peacemaker, a Mohawk chief of supernatural origins who consoled Hiawatha and presented him with a belt of wampum. (In another version, Hiawatha finds the wampum in a pond after a supernatural occurrence and

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[4] Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell, *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800* (Penn State Press, 2010), 158.

[5] It should again be emphasized that these traditions do not have a set interpretation, and can vary widely between sources. The version of the story I tell here comes from Fenton and Richter and Merrell, whose works are largely based on Seneca testimony. It is likely that a version of the story similar to the one described here would have been the one that Parker grew up with.

presents it to Deganawida.)[6] Deganawida, along with Hiawatha, preached a gospel of peace and cooperation, uniting the Five Nations in a Grand Council, consecrated by the power of the wampum belt, and establishing the Great League of Peace. The League represented all Five Nations, and its council was made up of fifty men from every clan.[7] According to more recent scholarship, the League had less of the attributes of a political state, with power to decide and enact internal and external policy, and was more a peacekeeping body whose intent was primarily to keep the union together through negotiation and ritual.[8]

Throughout the seventeenth century, the Five Nations expanded their territory in successful wars against the Wyandot Confederacy and Algonquian-speaking peoples to the east and south while cultivating relations with the newly-arrived European traders and colonists. Before 1664, their strongest ally was the Dutch, but when the English seized New Amsterdam that year, they supplanted the Dutch (whose presence in the New World had declined significantly) as the Five Nations' primary European partner.[9] Around the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, the new empires of Great Britain and France were locked in a struggle against one another for dominance on the North American continent. Though these European empires saw themselves as soon-to-be masters of America and the people within, the Native nations and confederations maintained their independence with diplomacy and warfare, supporting and opposing each European power, or remaining neutral, depending on their own foreign policy goals. In this vein, the now Six Nations supported and were supported by the British, fighting a number of wars against France and its Wyandot and Algonquian allies. These included King William's War (1688-1697), Queen Anne's War

[6] William Nelson Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 60-61.
[7] Richter and Merrell, *Beyond the Covenant Chain*, 17.
[8] Ibid, 17-18.
[9] Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 244.

(1702-1713), King George's War (1744-1748), and—as it is known in Anglo-American histories—the climactic French and Indian War (1754-1763), which saw the French North American empire crushed and the British gain the position of the preeminent European power on the continent. These wars, which were also theaters of wider conflicts fought all over the world, allowed the Six Nations to strike out at their traditional enemies while cultivating strong ties with a powerful foreign empire by assisting against their traditional enemy.

Though Great Britain had achieved a victory over France on the Plains of Abraham and in the halls of Versailles, the British Empire's nominal control of North America was far from being realized. Britain had to contend with the active resistance of a Native coalition under Odawa chief Pontiac around the Niagara region, while also dealing with the large population of French settlers in Canada. British victory also saw a change in its relationship with its wartime allies in the Six Nations. That year, 1763, to cement the alliance, the British government issued a proclamation forbidding Euro-American settlement beyond the Appalachian Mountains. Yet both British and local authorities proved unable or unwilling to seriously curtail white settlement of Iroquois lands, and the steady stream of settlers continued as the population of the Thirteen Colonies increased. Famous diplomat Sir William Johnson, the crown's foremost agent when dealing with the Six Nations and many other tribes, renegotiated the demarcation line farther west in the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, the largest cession of Iroquois land yet.[10] Scholarship is divided on the legacy of this event. In 1998, historian William Fenton claimed that 1768 was the moment when the British-Iroquois alliance ceased to be an equal partnership.[11] However, historian Theda Perdue, writing more recently, has argued that it did not seriously weaken the territorial integrity of the Six Nations or the Cherokee (the other major party at the negotiations),

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[10] Richter and Merrell, *Beyond the Covenant Chain*, 146.
[11] Ibid, 146.

as they had little use for the sparsely-populated Ohio country and were willing to give it up now in order to protect their traditional heartlands in New York.[12]

The American Revolutionary War was a defining event for the Six Nations. In 1775, the League attempted to maintain neutrality. However, with the war raging on their frontiers, various parties were drawn into the war on various sides, splitting the League. The Senecas, Mohawks, Cayugas, and Onondagas adhered to their traditional alliance with Britain, while the Oneidas and Tuscaroras took the American side. In 1778, a force of Loyalist militia and British-allied warriors (including Senecas) launched a raid on the Wyoming Valley that saw over three hundred Patriot (or Rebel, depending on one's perspective) militiamen killed, including those who surrendered. However, Seneca sources have maintained that the brutality of the fight was mainly attributable to the American Loyalists, and not their Seneca and Mohawk allies, who behaved more humanely.[13]

Despite the fact that not a single noncombatant had been killed, United States propaganda spread news of a horrific massacre of innocent women and children, often emphasizing the perceived savagery of Britain's Native allies.[14] This event, and later clashes on the frontier, convinced the Continental Congress that the British-Iroquois alliance in western New York and Pennsylvania needed to be broken by any means necessary. The 1779 Sullivan Expedition saw the Continental Army invade Iroquois territory. This was not merely a conventional offensive against the Six Nations' fighting forces, but an attempt to hit the people of the Iroquois where they lived. Generals George Washington and Philip Schuyler, who conceived of the campaign, envisioned it as an action of terror and instructed Sullivan to concentrate on destruction above all

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[12] Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 540.
[13] Arthur Caswell Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker: Last Grand Sachem of the Iroquois and General Grant's Military Secretary* (Buffalo Historical Society, 1919), 22-23.
[14] Ibid, 23.

else while taking hostages of women, children, the elderly, and the infirm.[15] The army sacked and burned Onondaga and many other Seneca and Cayuga villages, destroying cornfields, orchards, and food stockpiles on the way. In addition to thousands of dead, thousands more Iroquois refugees, mostly Senecas, fled their lands to Fort Niagara under British protection.[16]

The Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784 and the Treaty of Canandaigua in 1794 saw the Six Nations cede large portions of their land to the United States. The American victory in the war and the utter collapse of the British-Loyalist-Iroquois coalition on the western frontier left the Six Nations in a weak negotiating position. These war-ravaged communities were hit by an epidemic of alcoholism, and white land speculators often used this and other unscrupulous means to cheat them out of their land. As the Iroquois communities in their homeland of western New York began to shrink due in large part to the complete devastation of the Sullivan campaign, others left for the Ohio country for similar reasons, fragmenting these peoples even further.[17] Six Nations leaders also had to deal with the arrival of illegal white settlers and Christian missionaries. These events hit the Senecas particularly hard, and three key Seneca figures emerged during this period. Two were chiefs and statesmen, while the other was known as a prophet and a religious leader in a time of spiritual uncertainty. Cornplanter and Red Jacket were war chiefs and powerful orators who commanded immense respect within the Seneca nation. They had fought on the British side during the war, but afterwards had recognized the necessity of coming to a peaceful agreement with the newly-ascendant United States to help protect their lands and their people. While Cornplanter and Red Jacket conducted diplomacy in Philadelphia, another chief tended to his people's spiritual needs. Handsome Lake, Cornplanter's half-brother,

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[15] Sarah M. S. Pearsall et al., "Recentering Indian Women in the American Revolution," *Why You Can't Teach United States History without American Indians* (UNC Press Books, 2015), 163-164.
[16] Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 601.
[17] Ibid, 104.

became a religious leader within his community; he preached a gospel comprised of traditional Iroquois beliefs combined with some elements of Quaker-inspired Christianity.[18] Handsome Lake's message both promoted a strong sense of Seneca identity and Indigenous revivalism. His gospel held some similarities with the pan-Indian movements of figures like Pontiac and Tecumseh, but politically he rejected the armed resistance of Tecumseh's Confederation in the Ohio country and discouraged young Seneca warriors from traveling west to join them.[19]

Cornplanter and Red Jacket established a working relationship with President George Washington. The horrors of the Sullivan Expedition were still fresh in Seneca memory, and Washington was forever to be known by the Senecas as "Town Destroyer." However, the Senecas recognized that in 1784, it had been Washington who had issued the guarantee of the rights of the Iroquois to their traditional lands, albeit diminished ones, rejecting the call by some American political and military leaders, such as New York Governor George Clinton, for complete displacement.[20] Cornplanter voiced his gratitude to the Senecas' erstwhile enemy on behalf of his nation, while Washington presented Red Jacket with a silver medallion commemorating the peace in 1792.[21] Seneca leaders believed that the best security guarantee for their lands was a good diplomatic relationship with the preeminent colonial power in the region, whoever it might be. In 1664, they had switched from the Dutch to the British. With the British gone, the Senecas reached out to the Americans. Red Jacket, wearing the peace medal during every public appearance, was able to rhetorically use his good relationship with Washington and the president's many promises to the Six Nations to effectively challenge a myriad number of federal policies that threatened Seneca lands and sovereignty during subsequent administrations,

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[18] Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 104-108.
[19] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 24-25.
[20] Ibid, 27.
[21] Ibid, 211.

particularly that of Thomas Jefferson, and he stood steadfast against white encroachment against the Senecas.[22]

To further get on good terms with the United States, Cornplanter and Red Jacket brought the Seneca nation into war with Great Britain during the War of 1812. However, the fight against the British was just as personal for the Senecas as it was for the Americans. The British seizure of Grand Island on June 6, 1812, was an invasion of Seneca lands.[23] Several decades prior, the Senecas had fought with the British to defend their lands from the Americans. Now, they would do the opposite. On the fields of Canada, at the Battles of Fort George, Fort Niagara, Chippewa, and Lundy's Lane, American soldiers would fight alongside Seneca warriors. One of these warriors was a young man from Tonawanda who went by the name of William Parker.

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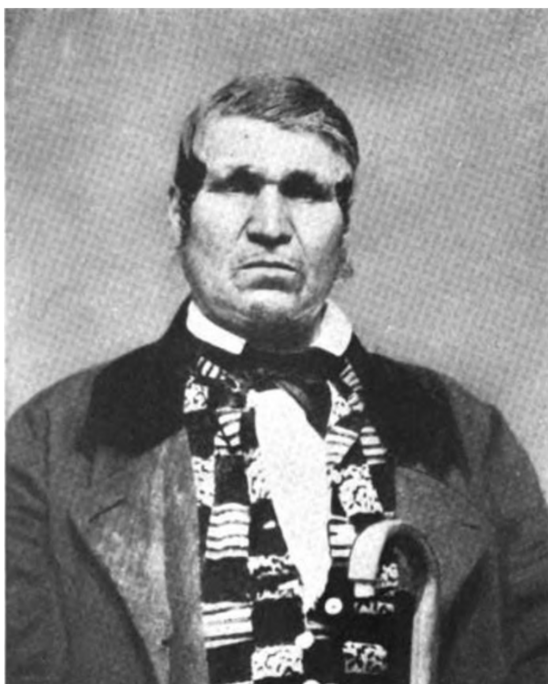
[22] John C. Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois" and the Invention of the Empire State* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 51-54.

[23] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 26.

Chapter 2: The Parkers of Tonawanda


WILLIAM PARKER
Father of Ely S. Parker. (From a daguerreotype.)

ELIZABETH PARKER
Mother of Ely S. Parker. (From a daguerreotype.) [24]

These daguerreotypes of William and Elizabeth Parker, likely taken in the 1840s or 50s, show a Seneca couple dressed in the Euro-American fashion of the era. The distinguished air of the war veteran and successful miller is evident in William's portrait. Elizabeth appears to be in a more Indigenous style, but still dignified in a similar way.

By the seventeenth century, west of Iroquois territory lived a people called the Neutral Nation by the Iroquois, though they referred to themselves as the Ongwe-oweh. These Neutrals, so-called because of their consistent policy of neutrality in the many wars between the Iroquois and Wyandots, were a coalition of villages who lived on the present-day Niagara Peninsula and the far western tip of New York, east of the Genesee River.[25] In 1651, a war broke out between the Senecas, aided by the Mohawks, and the Neutrals. It was caused either by a boundary dispute, the Neutrals' choice to give asylum to some Wyandots, competition over the Great

[24] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 40,
[25] Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 246.

Lakes fur trade market, or a combination of all three.[26],[27] The Senecas and Mohawks destroyed the Neutral town near the present-day site of Buffalo and soon destroyed the Neutral Nation in its entirety. The Senecas absorbed the existing Neutral population into their own, and although the existing Neutrals were given fewer rights than natural-born Senecas, the two populations mingled over time and became a single assimilated nation.[28] This fit within the traditional definition of a "mourning war," a practice in northeastern Native cultures of waging war that centered on the accumulation of new members into the nation as "captives."[29] Among the new lands recently acquired by the Senecas was a thickly-forested little valley between the Niagara Peninsula and the Genesee country called Tonawanda. The Senecas had fought to gain Tonawanda, and, more than once in their long history, they would need to fight to keep it.

Seneca ownership of Tonawanda was confirmed by the Treaties of Fort Stanwix and Canandaigua, as well as the later Treaty of Big Tree of 1797. By the end of the 18th century, a Seneca family known as the Parkers (they had taken their English surname from a British officer who had stayed with them during the Revolutionary War; he had been adopted into the Senecas, and when he left he bestowed the name "Parker" on the family) lived in a log cabin on a homestead on the banks of Tonawanda Creek.[30] William Parker was one of three brothers who had been devoted followers of Handsome Lake. When in 1815 William Parker returned from the War of 1812 to his farm, he worked a sawmill on his property while growing corn and hunting deer. Sometime in the early 1820s, he married a woman named Elizabeth, granddaughter of Jemmy Johnson or Sos-he-o-wa, a son of Red Jacket, and a prominent chief and spiritual leader who had come to be Handsome Lake's successor after the old prophet had died in 1815.[31] The

[26] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 13.
[27] Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 246.
[28] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 13-14.
[29] Pearsall et al., *Recentering Indian Women in the American Revolution*, 161.
[30] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 21.
[31] Ibid, 41.

couple had six children, five sons and one daughter: Levi, Nicholson, Caroline, Ely, Spencer, and Isaac Newton. Ely Samuel Parker, or Hasanoanda, was their fourth child. According to Tonawanda tradition, Elizabeth had a strange dream four months before Ely's birth. When she took this dream to an interpreter, he told her the following:

> A son will be born to you who will be distinguished among his nation as a peace-maker; he will become a white man as well as an Indian. He will be a wise white man, but will never desert his Indian people, nor 'lay down his horns,' as a great chief, his name will reach from the east to the west, the north to the south, as great among his Indian family and pale-faces. His sun will rise on Indian land and set on white man's land. Yet the ancient land of his ancestors will fold him in death.[32]

It was this environment in which Ely Samuel Parker was born to William and Elizabeth Parker in 1828 in the hamlet of Indian Falls, near the town of Pembroke, New York.[33] Even at this early stage we can see the conflict, compromise, and contradiction of identity that would come to play such a role in his life: to be born a Seneca was to inherit a vast, rich history and culture going back centuries, part of a nation with strong traditions that assumed a central position in what was once one of the most powerful confederations on the North American continent. However, Ely was the son of William Parker. Though a proud Seneca, William was also a settled farmer and miller, devout Christian, and American patriot. During his life, Ely Parker would be influenced by both of these competing identities.

Ely Parker's early schooling, not counting the considerable education he must have gotten at home from his parents, took place at the Tonawanda Baptist Mission School, a small

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[32] "A Prophecy Fulfilled." *Buffalo Express*, January 24, 1897.
According to Arthur Parker, this prophecy was apparently first recorded by Harriet Maxwell Converse during one of her many trips to Tonawanda, which would place its earliest record likely in the late 1880s.
[33] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 51.

schoolhouse run by white missionaries on the Tonawanda reservation.[34] Upon entering school for the first time, Parker was given his Seneca name: Hasanoanda, meaning "The Reader."[35] According to Arthur C. Parker, William Parker was "...a progressive in his desires for his children," even though "his own talents were used mostly in raising wheat and horses," and so, to give his children the opportunities he never had, William made sure that all six Parker children got to go to school.[36]

Ely Parker's coming of age was marked by a rapid cultural shift and a new threat to the Senecas' sovereignty. Individual Seneca families had been trading their bark houses for log cabins, and their buckskin clothes for cloth ones. Even the Parker family had been undergoing this process since before Ely's birth. In this atmosphere of cultural change, the threat of illegal white settlement loomed even larger. The completion of the Erie Canal had made land in western New York highly desirable. Ely Parker's world was changing before his eyes, even before he had gotten to know himself. He wanted a chance to grow up in traditional surroundings, closer to what he felt were the older Seneca ways.

At age ten, in 1838, Ely Parker set off on a journey north, after obtaining permission from his parents. Around Grand River in Ontario, Canada, was a Six Nations reservation that Ely had wanted to visit. Established by Mohawk Chief Joseph Brant, Grand River functioned as a sort of government-in-exile for those of the Six Nations who had refused to abandon their alliance with Britain and place themselves at the mercy of the victorious Americans following the end of the Revolutionary War.[37] Grand River was seen by many Iroquois as a place where their traditions and institutions were still going strong, as opposed to the weakened and more assimilated

[34] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 55.
[35] Ibid, 58.
[36] Ibid, 58-59.
[37] Ibid, 72.

communities back in New York. Ely made the journey north with an older friend, and while there learned hunting, fishing, and woodcraft.[38] However, he had another formative experience of a different type. To earn money, Ely drove horses from the home of an Oneida horse-seller to the British-Canadian military outposts at London and Hamilton. On one of these journeys, he was accompanied by several British officers, who mocked him for his heavily-accented English and poor grammar.[39]

Arthur C. Parker notes that this anecdote was told to him by his great uncle personally, and apparently marks a turning point in Parker's life whereupon he decided to "become a master of the English tongue."[40] The encounter with the British officers, in addition to stimulating Parker's drive for intellectual success, may also have impacted him in other ways. In addition to William Parker's war stories and the pride with which he recounted his service, the way in which these British officers took pride in their rank and status may have influenced a later decision Parker made in his life. Soon, however, he would need his language skills first and foremost, for the next stage in the fight for the Senecas' homeland and sovereignty would not be fought on the field of battle, but in courtrooms, statehouses, and in the halls of Congress.

[38] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 73.
[39] Ibid, 73.
[40] Ibid, 73.

Chapter 3: Usurpation and Tyranny

The Ogden Land Company, led by experienced land speculators Thomas L. Ogden and Joseph Fellows, had their sights set on the five Seneca reservations in western New York for much of the 1830s. On January 15, 1838, while Ely Parker was up north at Grand River, the Ogden Company concluded the Second Treaty of Buffalo Creek. This was the era of "Indian Removal," the forcible displacement of Native American tribes from their ancestral lands to areas west of the Mississippi River to make way for white settlement. The "Five Civilized Tribes" of the American southeast, as the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, and Seminole peoples were known, were already in the process of being evicted from their homes by the United States government under President Andrew Jackson's policy. The Second Treaty of Buffalo Creek opened by stating that the "true interest" of the Native Americans of New York "must lead them to seek a new home among their red brethren in the West."[41] The fifteen articles of the treaty stipulated that the Senecas, Onondagas, Tuscaroras, Oneidas, and Cayugas living in New York were signing away all of their land east of the Mississippi and would be compensated with a parcel of land in eastern Kansas.[42]

To say that the Tonawanda Senecas were surprised at this development would be an understatement. Arthur C. Parker claims that not a single Tonawanda chief had signed the treaty, and the only Tonawanda signature present on the document was forged. Many of the Seneca chiefs who had signed were either the recipients of large cash bribes or random individuals who the Ogden Company had claimed to be chiefs.[43] The vast majority of the Seneca nation which

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[41] Loren, "1838 Treaty at Buffalo Creek," *Tuscarora and Six Nations Websites*, n.d., http://www.tuscaroras.com/index.php/1838-treaty-at-buffalo-creek.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Arthur Caswell Parker and Temple R. Hollcroft. "Ely S. Parker – Man and Mason." *Transactions: The American Lodge of Research of Free and Accepted Masons*, Volume VIII, 1961.

opposed the sale mobilized and fought back against this outrage, sending a delegation along with a petition from the chiefs of the Allegheny, Tonawanda, Buffalo Creek, and Cattaraugus bands to Congress and President Martin Van Buren.[44] The petition said in no uncertain terms that the treaty was illegal and illegitimate, that the few chiefs who were willing to sell their land had no authority over the vast majority who had refused to sell, and asked Congress to suspend the ratification of the treaty. When this initiative failed, they sent a second petition the next year, with language even more direct than the first one.

> We are fully determined that we go west only as prisoners of war…. It will be by sheer force. It shall not be by the force of the Law but by the hand of violence. Let us be understood. We wish not to make vain threats. We are so weak perhaps as to be considered contemptible. But there are circumstances in which it is better to give up all, yea even life than to submit. We are determined after long and mature deliberation never to go west and if need be we will gather around our father's graves and there surrender a life no longer desirable because all its blessings have been torn from us by usurpation and tyranny.[45]

Central to these petitions is the idea that this treaty was not legitimate under national law. Legal force is directly contrasted with illegal force, and the Senecas claim that any enforcement of the treaty would constitute the latter. Additionally, these petitions conveyed ideas of dying on one's feet rather than living on one's knees, and resorting to armed resistance to tyranny after the failure of petitions and attempts at peaceful legal redress. They should have struck a chord with the officials representing the United States of America, whose founding documents are based on the same ideals. Perhaps the Senecas were actively trying to invoke sentiments of the Revolution for their audience, but it did not work. The fight was to go on much longer.

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[44] Seneca Nation of Indians. *Petition to U.S. Congress, 25th, 3d session*. January 30, 1839, pg. 1-11. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

[45] Council of the Seneca Nation. *Petition to U.S. Government*. 1840. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

Ely Parker would be a key player in this fight, but before he could be of use to the Seneca people, he would need to further his own education. After returning home from Grand River, Parker completed his education at the mission school and was accepted into Yates Academy, becoming the only Native American student in his class of 250 individuals.[46] At Yates, Parker was well on his way to the mastery of the English language that he had been determined to achieve. In a long address to the school's Englopian Society, an academic extracurricular organization of Yates students, Parker waxed poetic about the Englopian Society's noble cause—that of the self-improvement of one's mind and intellect—in dramatic and flowery language that would be impressive for a fifteen-year-old of any era. "We behold Englopians that are ready to sacrifice anything for [the Society's] sustenance than to see it go down and its members scattered to the four winds of heaven."[47]

His writings were not confined to intellectual pursuits, however. Even at this age he was trying to do his part for the Seneca people, writing several letters to Representative William A. Moseley, representing New York's 32nd District in Congress. Though Mosely helped Parker in a few ways, such as giving him the information to reach the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, he ultimately told Parker that it was no use trying to convince the president not to ratify a treaty, as he was certain to do so if the Senate had confirmed it.[48] Just a week after this setback, Parker wrote a letter to his parents on the subject of two men who had come to Tonawanda uninvited to appraise improvements on the land, estimating prices for sale. Parker stated unequivocally that as this treaty was illegitimate, and that the state had no right to enforce it, he recommended for "...the Tonawandas to hold their lands repelling every individual who should attempt by fraud

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[46] Richard Young and Ann Spurling. *Warrior in Two Worlds*. November 24, 1999, 10:05.
[47] Ely S. Parker. *Address to the Englopian Society*. September 20, 1843. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*
[48] William A. Moseley. *Letter to Ely S. Parker*. January 19, 1844. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

and deceit to remove them from their present homes."[49] Though petitions and lawsuits would be the Senecas' primary weapons in the fight to keep their land, Parker recognized that there might be a time when resistance by force of arms would become necessary.

After two years at Yates, Parker entered the prestigious Cayuga Lake Academy (which, despite its Indigenous name, catered almost solely to white students) in Aurora, New York. Even more so than at Yates, his status as a Native American stood out among the scions of many of New York's aristocratic families. President Millard Fillmore had graduated there, as had several successful New York businessmen.[50] Yet even as Parker continued to excel in academia, he did not lose sight of his background, culture, and history. Writing of the education of Ely Parker and his brother Nicholson, Arthur C. Parker states,

> They felt that it was incumbent upon them to live up to all the higher ideals men had of the red race and to disprove all the current tales that the Indian was lazy, drunken and inferior in intellect. Their life at the academy gave them two great opportunities. The first was that of reading the then recently published works of Thatcher and Drake. Here they found recorded the proof of the fine qualities possessed by the old leaders of the race before the time when contact had caused too great corruption. They read with the joy of discoverers of Tecumseh and Pontiac, or Philip of Pokanet and of Garangula. This not only awakened a healthful race pride but spurred on ambition. The second opportunity that came was that of delivering in oration and essay, heroic defenses of the Indian. Once they had declaimed the virtues of the red man's way they were compelled to live up to those virtues, and they did this to the last detail.[51]

It is interesting that Arthur Parker places the beginning of Ely and Nicholson's fascination with Indigenous heroes here at Cayuga Academy and not at home at Tonawanda. It

[49] Ely S. Parker. *Letter to William Parker*. January 29, 1844. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*
[50] "MRS. CLEVELAND'S COLLEGE." *New York Times* (1857-1922), June 16, 1889.
[51] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 76.

may be that William Parker was more concerned with teaching his sons Seneca history than about other Native cultures, but it also may be a natural reaction to the assumptions of cultural superiority of their classmates and teachers. If this is the case, Ely Parker had a mission to both defuse stereotypes and educate the wider public about the truth of Native history.

Parker's time at Cayuga was an eventful one. His studies were always influenced by the politics of the day as well as his own anxieties. Once, he gave a long and eloquent speech to his fellow students in which he condemned among other things British imperialism, American slavery, and Native American genocide. He wrote,

> America…is in the hands of God. And no wonder that the immortal Jefferson in view of her national sins said, "When I remember that God is just, I tremble for my country." It is true that religion, and learning and liberty have here their homes, but the principles of justice have governed neither the nation nor the people. If you ask me how so, let the burdened sons of Africa answer, who are calling upon God to remember their oppression.[52]

The site of Cayuga Academy and the present Aurora Masonic Center (Scipio Lodge No. 110), in Aurora, New York. The Masonic Center contains Parker's original Masonic apron. Photographs by the author.

[52] Parker and Hollcroft, "Ely S. Parker – Man and Mason.", 238.

Parker's opinions and language here reflect an increasing trend among pious Americans (mostly northerners) in the years before the Civil War, that slavery was a mortal sin that could only be atoned with blood.[53] This sentiment saw increasingly popular abolitionist ideas combined with Old Testament-inspired fire-and-brimstone preaching, and a famous example of this can be found in Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address. The Protestant revivalism of the Second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century was still fresh in memory, and one tangible outcome of the movement was the use of religious imagery and justifications for progressive causes. Harriet Beecher Stowe and John Brown used it in the context of abolitionism, while Methodist minister William Apess used the same language to argue for Native American rights. Parker, originally educated by Baptist missionaries, must have been particularly receptive to this line of thinking. It may partially explain his later desire to serve the Union during the Civil War.

Also during this time, Parker's participation in the Senecas' fight against dispossession began in earnest. August 1844 saw the Ogden Company attempt to hold a public auction of lots on the Tonawanda reservation, adding even more urgency to the Senecas' attempts at legal redress.[54] At the age of sixteen, Ely Parker served as a translator for a delegation to Albany headed by Chiefs John Blacksmith and Jemmy Johnson, his great-grandfather (in the Iroquois' matrilineal society, his status as Johnson's *maternal* great-grandson had extra significance).[55] Parker had previously helped from a distance, by writing letters and writing signatures for chiefs who could not write in English. His work as a translator held special significance: he was acting as a bridge between cultures, societies, and political ideas, and he was putting the language skills which he had been so ardently pursuing to the test. This was the first time that he would be sent directly into the halls of power, but it would not be the last.

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[53] James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 88.
[54] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 10:46.
[55] Ibid, 11:01

Between his studies and his service to his people, Parker found time for one more pursuit. In 1844, he was browsing an Albany bookstore when he met a man named Lewis Henry Morgan. Morgan was an up-and-coming sociologist and anthropologist, long interested in the history and traditions of the Iroquois. Morgan was one of many young male intellectuals at this time to have a romanticized vision and fascination with Native Americans, relying on images of the "noble savage," popular in the works of James Fenimore Cooper, to inform their fixation.[56] Their ideas were closely linked with the concepts of the "vanishing Indian" and that Native peoples and cultures would be inevitably displaced by Euro-Americans and their culture.[57] Parker, however, was no Indian caricature, nor was he totally assimilated. He was a bright, highly-educated young man, dedicated to preserving and educating others about the history and culture of his people. When men like Morgan, who had a genuine interest in Iroquois history and culture, had misinformed or exaggerated ideas, Parker was happy to help them get it right. Morgan had also previously founded a fraternal organization made up of white men called the Grand Order of the Iroquois, based in Aurora, New York. This group, associated with the local Freemason lodge, was a literary and research organization that also wore Native-inspired regalia and conducted mystical ceremonies.[58] Such an organization today would be considered highly offensive for its basis in cultural appropriation and assumption of Native experiences. Parker, however, joined it himself (and also became a lifelong Freemason), becoming the Order's treasurer.[59] In his capacity as a member, Parker did his best to inject more authenticity into the group's paraphernalia and proceedings. If Parker was able to educate others on his people and bring awareness to their plight, he would do so. It also helped that Morgan was personally sympathetic

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[56] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 13:42.
[57] Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
[58] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 80.
[59] Lewis Henry Morgan, *Letter to Ely S. Parker,* May 8, 1844. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946*.

to the Senecas in their dispute with the Ogden Company and the United States government, as a result of his fascination with the Iroquois people. He would make sure that the Grand Order of the Iroquois would help fight the Ogden Company and its speculators in whatever way it could.[60]

In 1842, a Third Treaty of Buffalo Creek had returned to the Senecas their lands on the Allegheny, Cattaraugus, and Oil Springs reservations, but maintained the cession of Tonawanda and Buffalo Creek. In 1846, Ely Parker traveled to Washington, D.C. Despite making multiple comments on the expensiveness of the city, he was evidently impressed by it, writing a letter to an unidentified man named Davis describing the National Fair, the fashionable dress of D.C. high society, and the advanced machinery of the shops and houses, while referring to President James K. Polk as a "curious, unknown critter," which may refer to Polk's appearance and austere manner.[61] Parker got his chance to meet Polk soon, and asked the president to repeal the treaty. Polk sent Parker's petition to the Senate, but nothing came of this. During another audience with Polk, however, the president assured Parker that although he was not able to overturn the treaty, he would make sure that the federal government would not act to enforce it.[62] While in Washington, Parker rubbed shoulders with many important people, including Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun. Though such prominent political figures were more accessible to the common person then than they are today, it is possible Parker may have had help from Morgan or other friends from Cayuga. Parker's strength as a speaker also endeared him to those he met. When Parker was walking in the street one day, Sarah Childress Polk, the president's wife, had her carriage stop to give him a ride.[63] Parker also got to spend that New Year's Eve in the home of Dolly Madison.[64] He kept a diary for two weeks in January 1847, recounting his

[60] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 81.
[61] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to "Friend Davis,"* May 27, 1846. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946*.
[62] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 17:40.
[63] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 78.
[64] Parker and Hollcroft, "Ely S. Parker – Man and Mason," 234.

progress in lobbying various offices and groups and noting a number of incidents and anecdotes during his time in the nation's capital.[65]

During this time in Washington, Parker received horrifying news. On January 11, 1847, he received a letter from his brother Levi describing a letter that he had received from one Benjamin Williams. Some years prior, a number of Senecas had decided to voluntarily comply with the treaty and venture out into Kansas on their own. Levi told his brother that by this point, two thirds of these migrants had died from exposure, disease, or other causes in what was to the Senecas a foreign and alien land.[66] Parker stayed in Washington to do what he could, but found that his efforts were bringing diminishing returns and increasing hostility. If he used this humanitarian tragedy to try to elicit sympathy in Washington, it was not very successful. Attending a reception, Parker noticed that the event's wealthy and prominent guests were staring at him. He felt that they saw him as "a savage brave, who had the audacity and impudence to mingle with nobility."[67] Parker fought on, but on February 19, 1847, the Senate voted on the Tonawandas' petition. Despite admitting in word and in print that the treaty was most likely both fraudulent and illegal, the Senate voted the petition down on the grounds that to repeal any treaty, legal or not, "...would not only tend strongly to unsettle the whole of our Indian policy, but would open a field of interminable difficulty, embarrassment, and expense."[68]

The defeat of the petition must have been a heavy blow to Parker, as it was to all the Tonawanda Senecas. Unable to help his people at the level of the federal government, Parker decided to concentrate on two different paths: pursuing a law career to challenge the treaty in court, and educating the general public on Seneca traditions and culture. The reasoning behind

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[65] Ely S. Parker, *Diary*, January 1-13, 1847. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946*.
[66] Levi Parker, *Letter to Ely S. Parker*, January 11, 1847. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*
[67] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 18:59.
[68] U.S. Congress, 29th, 2nd session. *Senate Document 156.* February 19, 1847. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

the latter was that if he could increase public knowledge of his people, they would be more sympathetic to the Senecas' plight. For example, the young white intellectuals of the Grand Order of the Iroquois had actually come to understand Seneca ways and traditions better thanks to Parker, and the influence of its members and their often prominent families proved an ally to the Seneca cause.

Chapter 4: A Ward of the State

Parker's first known mention in a newspaper appeared on May 4, 1847, in the *Elyria Courier*. The unnamed author of the column speaks of a "young Indian," spoken of by Henry R. Schoolcraft (a white ethnologist and historian of Native Americans, much like Morgan) as "one of the most intelligent he had ever met in our state." The author notes Parker's appearance at the annual meeting of the Western Historical Society in "the costume of the men of the woods" and wearing the same silver medallion George Washington presented to Red Jacket in 1792. He also had with him a manuscript to show to the various society members, an initial draft of a history of the Iroquois that he had been writing. "I do not recollect another instance of the history of these memorable people drawn up by one of themselves," recounts the author.[69] There had been histories of the Iroquois before, written by white men. Parker's goal was to educate, but to do so with authenticity. It was not enough to tell the story of his people, it had to be told correctly, and this nineteen-year-old felt that he was the best man for the job.

Later that year, Parker was approached by the *Batavia Times*, who requested that he send them a written account of the Grand Council of the Six Nations at Tonawanda, which took place from October 4 to 7, 1847. The editor noted before the account that "...the article is set up from Mr. Parker's own very neat and legible manuscript, without the alteration of a comma, capital letter or word. It is quite seldom that an article sent us for publication is written and punctuated with so much accuracy." While Parker's Seneca background lends his writing authenticity, his undeniable intellect and academic achievement makes it clear and concise. He evidently considered both authenticity and clarity for a white audience to be essential to his cultural work. Parker recounted in great detail the four days of ceremony and speeches, headed by Chief Jemmy

[69] "Ely S. Parker," *Elyria Courier*, May 4, 1847.

Johnson. Parker's recounting of Johnson's speeches depicted the religion of Johnson's predecessor, Handsome Lake, the prophet of the new Seneca religion mentioned earlier in this paper. The evidence of the Second Great Awakening is present here too, even in a faith that is not explicitly Christian, with the way that Johnson speaks and Parker portrays his words. As we have seen before, Parker was adept at framing Seneca culture in a way that the white people of the day could understand and empathize with.

Johnson described how Handsome Lake's faith formed around the turn of the previous century, when the Seneca people were at their weakest and most vulnerable, and gave them hope for the future. Despite the presence of Christian themes in Parker's depiction of the Senecas' religion, he says that Johnson's words explicitly reject the idea that Jesus Christ's suffering had saved the Senecas. All Senecas, except those too impious or cruel, would be reunited with their Creator in heaven. Parker notes that in the Seneca religion, white men remained on Earth in a kind of limbo, before the Son of God gave proper judgment to each one of them. A notable exception to this policy is George Washington, who, because of his good deeds, has a reserved spot in heaven. The Seneca people's complex relationship with the first president is evident here. The armies of the Town Destroyer had caused untold suffering to the people of the Six Nations, but his willingness to deal fairly with the Senecas after the war and his reception of Red Jacket and Cornplanter were equally felt and remembered. By giving Washington this special status, Johnson was setting a virtuous white man apart from those evil whites who coveted the Senecas' lands, just as Red Jacket did when he wore the peace medal and invoked Washington's memory in the defense of Seneca lands. After ceremonies and dances on the second and third days of the gathering, the final day saw

> …many pathetic and eloquent speeches made by various Sachems of the Confederacy in regard to the perpetuity and purity of their religion. But they

> dreaded the future, the fact staring them in the face that some portion of the whites had determined to rob them of the last heritage left them by their fathers, and to drive them unwilling from their homes, their council fires, and the graves of their fathers, to a western wilderness, where naught to them was, save misery and death. They prayed by all that was sacred to them in the memory of their fathers and the justice and mercy of the Great Spirit, that it might not be permitted to them to accomplish their destructive designs. They resolved, Providence permitting, to meet again around the Council fire, always kept burning at Tonawanda, next year.[70]

Parker's duty to inform people about Seneca culture was not merely to satisfy public curiosity. In doing so, he wanted to bring awareness to an impending humanitarian catastrophe and to the deaths that had already occurred, to elicit public sympathy and potentially gain allies. The Seneca sachems at this gathering might have been praying for help from their Creator, but Parker was looking for aid in the secular world. His appearances at historical societies and his contributions to local newspapers were no less political acts with political objectives than were his meetings with President Polk. This particular council meeting held other significance for him: William Parker, his father, was raised to the rank of war chief. Parker closed out his entry with a question: "...heaven only knows whether the place where the Chiefs and wise men of the Six Nations have so often met to counsel, will continue to be preserved to them, or whether that, to them sacred ground, is to be desecrated by land speculators."[71] He signed with his Seneca name, *Ha-sa-no-an-da*.

Unlike characters in a James Fenimore Cooper novel, Ely Parker and the Seneca people were neither confined to past history nor to an inevitable process of vanishing from the world.

[70] "Indian Council of the Six Nations at Tonawanda," *Evening Post*, October 23, 1847.
[71] Ibid.

They were an existing, living people whose fate was being decided in the courts and statehouses. The idea that Native Americans were dying out naturally and were incompatible with the modern world, a common concept in the early nineteenth century, assumed a certain level of justification for the violence and exploitation being done to them and removed agency from those effecting said violence and exploitation. In Parker's view, as can be seen in the final quotation, there is no room for inevitability. The Seneca people and their traditions still exist in the United States, and their fight is not one against an intangible current of history, but against the very real power of human greed and apathy.

In the late 1840s and early 1850s, Parker and Morgan's partnership entered a new stage, and was marked by a transactional relationship. Parker wanted Morgan's help to secure him a path to a law career, and Morgan wanted Parker to help him with his anthropological studies of the Iroquois. Morgan secured Parker an apprenticeship at a prominent local law firm: Rice & Angel of Ellicottville, Cattaraugus County, New York. Parker worked hard in his new studies, throwing himself into his work as a student of law. However, after three years of studying, he found out that he was disqualified from taking the New York State Bar. Despite being born in New York and his family having lived there for centuries at least, he was not a citizen, but a ward of the state because of his birth into a Native nation. Many recent court cases had emphasized this, such as 1831's *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, which ruled that the status of Native Americans was that of "domestic dependent nations" meaning that they were subjects and not citizens, afforded paternalistic protection but no political rights. To undergo three years of hard work and achieve more than competence only to be turned away on such a technicality as this was a heavy blow for Parker. Arthur C. Parker describes his rather understandable reaction:

> He was a man without a country, a victim of legal injustice and popular prejudice. No Seneca could curse in his own tongue. He had to talk "white man" to do that,

> and it is said Ely for once talked "white man" curses, though ever after he abjured the use of such language.[72]

This line of Arthur Parker's calls to mind a line from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, spoken by Caliban to Prospero: "You taught me language, and my profit on 't / Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!"[73]

As Parker began to look for another career path with Morgan's help, the two of them continued to work together on Morgan's study. The letters between them during this period often contain Morgan's requests and Parker's answers regarding Seneca names for various objects and the finer points of Seneca laws and rites, even if the letters are on another subject entirely. The entire Parker family pitched in to help with Morgan's project, with Ely's siblings Caroline, Nicholson, and Newton sending him articles such as moccasins and silverware which Morgan paid for.[74] In 1851, Morgan published his finalized work, *The League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee or Iroquois*. Though Morgan was the only credited author, he dedicated the book to "Hasanoanda" and made it clear in the introduction that the finished product was a result of their joint efforts.[75] If we consider *League of the Iroquois* as an anthropological study, it is as much about the Parker family as it is about the Six Nations as a whole. Caroline Parker even modeled for some of the book's illustrations. Morgan, though his work and viewpoints are criticized today as dated, was appreciated by many of the Senecas, for his cultural study as much as for his personal investment in the Senecas' fight for their land. The Parker family especially appreciated his help in getting Nicholson and Caroline into the New York State Normal School (now known as SUNY

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[72] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 79.
[73] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (1611), 1.2.437-439.
[74] Lewis Henry Morgan, *Letter to Caroline G. Parker*, November 13, 1849. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*
[75] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 22:44.

Albany).[76] Arthur C. Parker gives Morgan particular praise in his biography. He visited Seneca land several times, and on October 31, 1847, he was officially adopted into the nation as a brother of Chief Jemmy Johnson himself, made part of the Hawk Clan, and given the name Tayadawuhkuh, meaning "One lying across," or "Bridging the Gap."[77] In previous correspondence between Morgan and Parker, especially regarding Morgan's fraternal organization, Morgan had signed the name "Schenandoah," a name of Iroquois origin.[78]

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[76] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 81.
[77] Ibid, 81-82.
[78] Lewis Henry Morgan, *Letter to Ely S. Parker,* November 14, 1845. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

Chapter 5: Promotion and Succession

With his prospects of a legal career shattered, Parker turned to find a source of employment that he would not be excluded from. In December 1848, Parker solicited Morgan for help in securing him a position as a correspondent for a newspaper "out west." It is not known why Parker would have wanted this job. Perhaps he was fed up with New York for a variety of reasons: to be a "ward of the state" was to be in essence a child, while in the west, the "west" was a land of opportunity where he could be his own man. He may have also been enticed by the possibility of being close to a larger group of Native peoples, and away from the settled east. Morgan acquiesced, writing to the editors of several newspapers, but he made it clear to Parker that he thought this move was a mistake, saying that the major newspapers all had regular correspondents already, and that the lesser papers would not pay enough for Parker to get by. "You would nine chances to ten throw yourself away," Morgan said of Parker's prospective move westward.[79] Instead, Morgan had another idea. He had a friend, Henry Pomeroy, who was working as an assistant engineer on the Genesee Valley Canal. Morgan had asked Pomeroy for a job on Parker's behalf, and while Pomeroy would not promise anything, he said that there might be an opening in one of the surveying parties working on the canal. "Give up your western notions which will only bring difficulty upon you," Morgan said, "and resolve to work your way up among us." He then closed out the letter with a request for the Seneca names of various objects.[80]

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[79] Lewis Henry Morgan, *Letter to Ely S. Parker,* December 14, 1848. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

[80] Ibid.

In his next letter to Morgan, Pomeroy said that once spring came around, a vacancy would open up in the surveying party, and that he would be happy to secure that spot for Parker.[81] Parker, in the meanwhile, got a crash course in engineering at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York.[82] Yet even as Parker began to settle into his new career, the precarious situation at Tonawanda was never far from his mind. On January 16, 1849, Parker received a letter from a friend, who told him the situation at Tonawanda. The local Senecas had forcibly driven off a party of surveyors and appraisers two weeks beforehand. The Sheriff of Batavia and Secretary of War William L. Marcy both declared that they would not intervene on behalf of the surveyors, although Parker's friend expressed anxiety over the new policy of the incoming Zachary Taylor administration.[83] It was a small victory, but a victory nonetheless, and reflective of Parker's attitude toward the defense of Tonawanda by any means necessary, as expressed in his letter back in 1844.

The new engineering career paid dividends for Parker, and he was soon receiving lucrative job offers. He eventually settled into a position working on the western terminus of the Erie Canal, with his office in Rochester. He was by all accounts a hard-working and competent engineer, and with his pay he bought a sizable estate close to his family home, to his siblings and aging parents.[84] Working in close proximity to Tonawanda allowed him to stay up to date on everything happening there. He also paid close attention to his siblings Nicholson and Caroline, attending school in Albany, and wrote them frequent letters encouraging them to study hard and sending them sums of money.[85]

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[81] Henry Pomeroy, *Letter to Lewis Henry Morgan,* December 23, 1848. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*
[82] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 79.
[83] R. B. Warren, *Letter to Ely S. Parker*, January 16, 1849. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946*.
[84] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 91.
[85] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Nicholson H. Parker*, June 13, 1851. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946*.

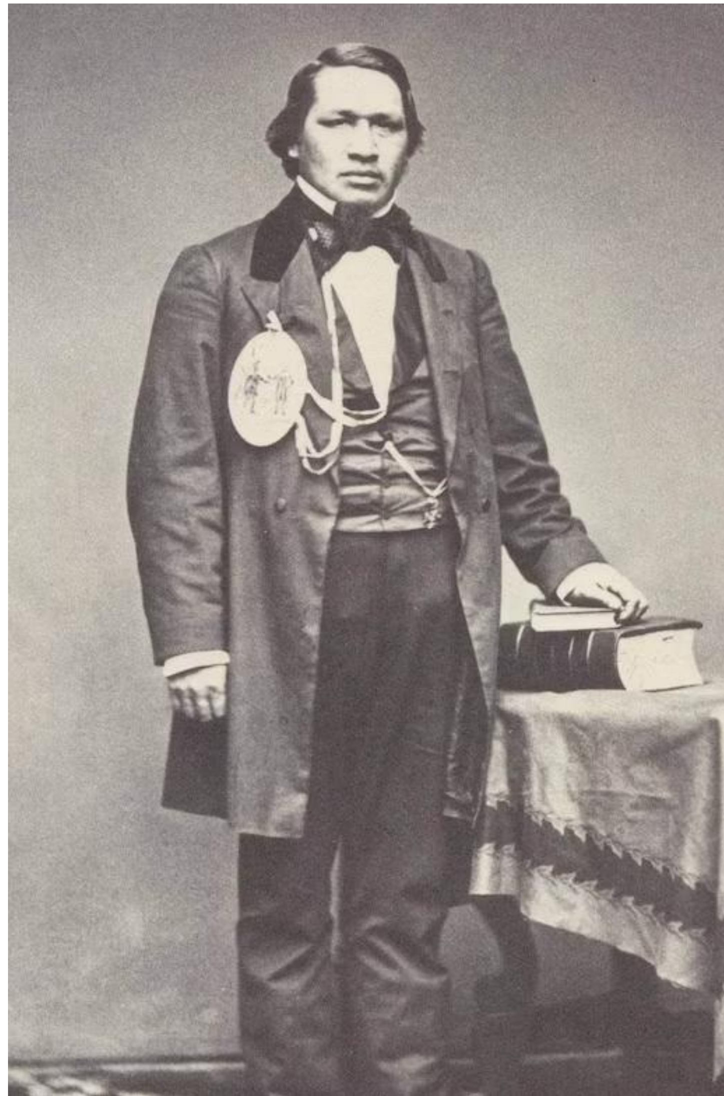
In 1851, Chief John Blacksmith died. In a ceremony at Tonawanda that July, Ely S. Parker was proclaimed Grand Sachem of the Six Nations in his place. A column in the *Buffalo Courier* writes that, around the council fire, after a number of songs and ceremonial proceedings,

> The Speaker invested [Parker] with the silver medal presented by Washington to the celebrated War chief Red Jacket and worn by him until his death. Mr. Parker, now in official dignity and honor at the head of the Six Nations, is an educated man, of fine talents and exemplary habits, and is one of the Assistant State Engineers.[86]

Nine war chiefs were appointed as well to fill other vacancies, among which was Ely's brother Spencer.[87] Ely Parker's formidable efforts in helping the cause of the Senecas, as well as his lineage as a maternal great-grandson of Jemmy Johnson and great-great-grandson of Red Jacket, must have made him an obvious choice to the Clan Matrons for Chief Blacksmith's successor. The silver medallion, which Parker had worn before, was now his. It symbolized a bridge between polities, the United States and the Seneca nation, and between distinguished leaders, George Washington and Red Jacket. The medallion meant much to Parker, and he would wear it frequently throughout the rest of his life. In addition to the rank and title and emblem, Parker gained a new name: Donehogawa, meaning "Keeper of the Western Door." In Six Nations tradition, the Iroquois League forms a longhouse, and the Senecas, the people residing the farthest west, are regarded as the keepers of the "western door" of said longhouse.[88] To have this traditional responsibility reflected in one's name was a high honor indeed. It should also be noted that Parker's new name, Donehogawa, functionally replaced his previous one, Hasanoanda, and

[86] "Indian Council of the Six Nations," *Buffalo Courier*, July 1851. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*
[87] Ibid.
[88] Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 225.

that it is improper to refer to him as the latter except when talking about the stages of his life when he bore that name, as has been done in this paper.

[89]

This picture of Parker, likely taken some time in the mid to late 1850s, shows the newly-minted Grand Sachem in formal Anglo-American attire, wearing the Red Jacket medallion. Even in this portrait, his imposing size and stature is evident to the viewer.

Arthur C. Parker describes the situation of the Tonawanda Senecas during this period:

> Their hearts were bitter and they refused to move from their homes. They were allowed to remain, since it was thought some means for ejecting them could be

[89] David Vergun, "Engineer Became Highest Ranking Native American in Union Army," U.S. Department of Defense, November 2, 2021.

> found. With this threat of sudden ejectment hanging over them the Tonawanda Senecas lived in constant fear. It was a fear that paralyzed effort and gave but scanty encouragement to industry or improvement. They lived in an atmosphere of constant suspense. But one ambition animated them. It was to get a deed by purchase for the land that was theirs. In that lay their only salvation.[90]

The Tonawandas were in a unique situation from their fellow Senecas on the other reservations. In addition to the fact that the Tonawanda reservation (not counting Buffalo Creek, which was the only reservation to be sold) was still under threat even after the 1842 treaty, the Tonawandas had split with the Allegheny, Cattaraugus, and Oil Spring Senecas over the latter's radical reform to their mode of governance in 1848. The Seneca people of the other three reservations were disillusioned with their traditional system of government by hereditary chiefs chosen by matrilineal lineage, which they felt had failed the Seneca people in the fight against land theft. 1848, the year of worldwide revolutions, saw the Senecas overthrow the old order in favor of a constitutional convention and a council of eighty-one democratically-elected chiefs. The Tonawanda Senecas, however, had refused to go along with this and retained their traditional government. Arthur C. Parker sums up the Tonawanda position and the reason for their opposition to this change:

> Any man who would get out and by power of fist, bribery or through force of personality, collect a following could be a "chief." This was veritable anarchy and was made good use of by the "land-grabbers." The Tonawandas alone were conservative and clung to the higher ideals of the old way.[91]

While the other Senecas conceived the new government as a republican democracy, Tonawandas saw it as a form of mob rule that flew in the face of their cherished and long-established tradition. To this day, the Tonawanda Band of Senecas and the Seneca Nation of New

[90] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 93.
[91] Ibid, 93.

York are entirely distinct federally-recognized entities. For now, what this meant was that the Tonawandas were going to have to fight alone.

In between his engineering work and his time looking after his siblings, Parker was still engrossed in Tonawanda affairs. In March 1852 he drew up a petition to be sent to Albany which would mandate the removal of white settlers who had purchased land from the Ogden Company by August 20th of that year, invoking an unnamed law of March 31, 1821, which apparently restricted white incursion on Native lands.[92] It is not known what became of this petition, but it showed that Parker's contribution to the Tonawandas' struggle was not over, even as he began to focus on his personal career. He wrote letters to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and even once to the President of the United States on various topics relating to the Tonawanda Senecas.[93]

A notable change can be seen in Parker's life around this time. Many letters addressed to him during this period—from school friends, extended family, and acquaintances—were asking him for help securing jobs.[94] To have gone from being out of work and relying on the connections of Lewis Henry Morgan to being able to use his own connections to secure work for others in just a few years shows how fast Ely Parker was rising to local prominence. He joined the New York State Militia and was commissioned a Captain of Engineers in the Rochester Regiment.[95] He also joined the Military Association of the State of New York.[96]

Parker's next assignment took him out of New York, his first extended stay outside of the state since his Washington, D.C. visit. In 1855, he was sent south to Norfolk, Virginia, to work

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[92] Ely S. Parker, *Draft of Petition*, March 1852. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

[93] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to the President of the U.S.*, March 21, 1853. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

[94] Caroline G. Parker, *Letter to Ely S. Parker*, February 15, 1855. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

[95] Laurence M. Hauptman, *The Iroquois in the Civil War: From Battlefield to Reservation* (Syracuse University Press, 1992), 49.

[96] Military Association of the State of New York, *Circular*, January 9, 1855. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

on the Chesapeake and Albemarle Canal. From his office at Fort Monroe, he led surveying teams and drafted out the canal's final location. Parker was surely talented at his job, but the monotony of his long evenings at work in his office was unpleasant. He liked to break the routine by mingling in local society and attending polite functions. Arthur C. Parker recounts a humorous anecdote from Parker's time in Virginia, when he and his colleagues attempted to enter a dance:

> When the uninvited party was about to enter the ball-room the floor manager stepped before the door and refused them admission. In vain did they argue–all except Parker; he acted. Stepping up to the offending manager he grasped him by the seat of the trousers and by the nape of the neck; carrying him a few steps to the stairs he held the terrified man over the abyss and then dropped him. Turning quietly as if nothing had happened, he entered the ball-room and had an enjoyable evening with his party. "The gentlemen as well as the ladies were very courteous," he confessed in later years when he was pressed for the story.[97]

According to Arthur C. Parker, Ely Parker was not a naturally violent man and tried to avoid conflict when he could. But if he needed to defend himself, or—as in the above case—he felt that he and his friends were being disrespected, he would be more than willing to act and to use his apparently immense strength to immediate effect.[98]

When his work in Virginia was complete, Parker had a brief spell at work on a series of lighthouses on the Great Lakes, a position he was personally offered by Secretary of the Treasury James Guthrie as a result of his successes in New York and Virginia.[99] This was followed by an assignment that would alter the trajectory of his life, not because of the work itself, but because of a chance meeting. By January 1857, Parker was in Galena, Illinois, leading the construction of a marine hospital and a customs house in the city. This job was Parker's most significant

[97] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 94-95.
[98] Ibid, 95.
[99] Ibid, 94.

responsibility yet, as evidenced by the significant amount of correspondence that survives from it. He was frequently writing letters to the new Secretary of the Treasury, Howell Cobb, on the subjects of how the federal government should buy the sites of both buildings and the material that should be used in their construction.[100] By the time the federal customs house was completed in 1859, it was declared by a reporter to be "the most perfect structure north of St. Louis and west of Chicago."[101]

Parker evidently did not care for the people of the then western states, writing in great detail to a friend from New York that

> [The locals] imagine that they are religious, refined, cultivated, acute, and sharp…and so they are, if an inordinate love of gold can be called religion – or the abundant use, in every expression or remark made in any company, of hard epithets may be called refinement & cultivation – or if the practice of cheating and barefaced lying or unconscientiously swindling a neighbor can be called acute or sharp, then the western people are the most religious, refined, cultivated, acute & sharp people that ever breathed the free air of heaven.[102]

For Parker, the Native American who always had to prove his intellect and education in the face of intense racism from New York and Washington high society, the chance to look down his nose at a group of uncultured white people may have felt good. But there was one exception to this rule, one local Illinoisian with whom Parker started a friendship. Ulysses S. Grant was a former United States Army Captain and a veteran of the Mexican-American War who had fallen on hard times and was now working as a clerk in his father's leather goods store.[103] Parker also

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[100] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Howell Cobb*, May 11, 1857. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

[101] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 27:46.

[102] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Lewis H. Blair*, June 9, 1857. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

[103] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 96.

got acquainted with Grant's friend, John Rawlins, and made a good impression on Jesse Grant, Ulysses's father.[104]

Meanwhile, the Tonawanda Senecas ultimately achieved their hard-won victory against the forces that would have driven them from their homes. On March 9, 1859, President James Buchanan signed into effect the Fourth Treaty of Buffalo Creek, originally negotiated in 1857. This treaty would see the Tonawanda Band of Senecas buy back the majority of the Tonawanda reservation from the Ogden Company using the money that was originally granted to them for what would have been their forced migration to the west, paying $256,000 total at a rate of over $20 per acre. Bureau of Indian Affairs clerk Charles E. Mix represented the United States, while Ely S. Parker was one of the five representatives of the Tonawandas. Ely's brother Nicholson acted as the official U.S. interpreter at every stage of the negotiations, translating from Seneca to English and vice versa.[105] The Tonawanda Senecas had finally emerged on the other side of two decades of threats and anxiety over the status of their land. A criminal treaty had stripped them of everything they owned, and Congress had upheld the fraudulent document. But the Tonawandas, true to their pledge to give up all rather than submit, had successfully fought back. The Tonawanda Senecas owed much of their ultimate success to the tireless efforts of the Grand Sachem Donehogawa.

[104] Parker and Hollcroft, "Ely S. Parker – Man and Mason," 238.
[105] "Treaty with the Tonawandas." *Washington Union*, April 5, 1859.

Chapter 6: "Grant's Indian"

In April 1861, the tensions between the northern and southern states over the issue of the expansion of slavery finally boiled over into open war with the firing on Fort Sumter. Though Ely Parker was keen to serve his country, according to Arthur C. Parker, he was reluctant to abandon his engineering work and did not immediately enlist, being under the impression that the war would end relatively soon.[106] However, early in 1862, with the war not only having not ended but now going very poorly for the Union, Parker resigned his position and resolved to enlist. He was inspired in part by the example of his friend Ulysses S. Grant, who had made a national name for himself with his capture of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson on the Tennessee River from the Confederates. Parker's first move was not to a recruiting office, but back home to Tonawanda to see his father, William Parker. Elizabeth Parker had died that February of an illness and her death was a hard blow to the entire family.[107] The old War of 1812 veteran was reluctant to see his son go off to war and risk losing him too, but after a night of careful thought, he gave his consent. During this visit home, Ely showed his father some illustrations from the war and several portraits of the key Union commanders in an edition of *Harper's Weekly*. According to Arthur C. Parker, William

> …looked at the portraits carefully and then placing his finger on that of Grant's said: "Here is the man who will be the great general who shall lead his army to victory. You follow him and you will be a great war captain, too."[108]

[106] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 99.
[107] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Nicholson H. Parker*, February 23, 1862. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*
[108] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 99-100.

This likely apocryphal story allowed Ely Parker to tie his fortunes to Grant in both a tangible and a spiritual sense, and to show non-Natives the way that his people were understanding this period of American history.

Upon gaining permission from his father, the Clan Matrons, and the Council of Civil Chiefs (a necessary move given his rank, which the Clan Matrons themselves had bestowed upon him), Grand Sachem Ely Parker went to war.[109] Traveling to Albany, New York, Parker secured an audience with Governor Edwin D. Morgan. With his impressive engineering credentials and rank in the state militia, Parker was confident that he could secure a commission. However, the governor took one look at the Native American in his office and told Parker that he had no use for him.[110] Though surprised and dejected, Parker was ultimately not discouraged. He went straight to Washington, D.C., to the War Department, to meet with Secretary William H. Seward. As a U.S. Senator for New York, Seward had in 1859 successfully shot down a late attempt by the Ogden Company to forcibly remove the Tonawanda Senecas to Kansas, and was hailed by some as a "friend of the Indians."[111] It is possible that Parker thought that Seward in particular would be receptive to his request to serve. But it turned out that Seward's response was even more racialized than that of Governor Morgan. According to Ely Parker's own account, relayed by Arthur,

> Mr. Seward in a short time said to me that the struggle in which I wished to assist, was an affair between white men and one in which the Indian was not called to act. "The fight must be settled by the white men alone," he said. "Go home, cultivate your farm and we will settle our own troubles without any Indian aid."[112]

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[109] Parker and Hollcroft, "Ely S. Parker – Man and Mason," 239.
[110] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 100.
[111] "The Six Nations." *New York Times* (1857-1922), March 5, 1859
[112] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 102-103.

Parker may have identified as an American, but those in power were not keen to expand the definition of that word to people beyond their own racial category. For Parker, this rebuke must have invoked memories of his rejection from the state bar and the invalidation of three years of effort. In this case, the rejection was especially painful as Parker had earlier resigned from his well-paying engineering job in order to serve. He had nowhere to go, except—as Seward had suggested—home to his family farm at Tonawanda.

As Ely Parker helped his father plow the fields, now Major General Ulysses S. Grant was leading the Army of the Tennessee in one of the most pivotal campaigns of the war, aimed at the capture of the port of Vicksburg on the Mississippi River. Grant's troops had crossed the river, driven the Confederates back into the city, and were now engaged in a drawn-out, grueling siege. Grant needed good engineers, and he could not think of a better candidate than his old friend from Galena, Ely S. Parker. Late in May 1863, a paper arrived at the Parker residence from the War Department, offering a commission as Captain of Volunteers, signed by President Abraham Lincoln himself. Parker accepted, and after a traditional Seneca prayer ritual asking for the Great Spirit to protect Donehogawa, he set off for Vicksburg.[113]

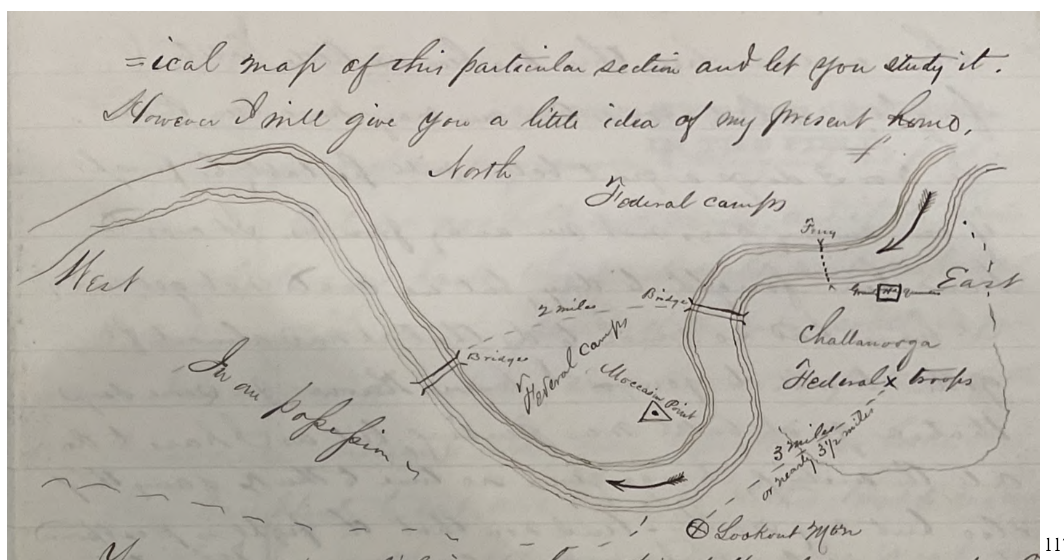
Upon arrival in the area of operations on June 25th, Parker was assigned as an engineer to General John E. Smith's 7th Division. As Grant wrote to Brigadier General Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant General of the U.S. Army,

> Gen. Smith commands a Division and is without an Asst. Adj. I am personally acquainted with Mr. Parker and think eminently qualified for the position. He is a full blooded Indian but highly educated and very accomplished. He is a Civil Engineer of conciderable [sic] eminence and served the Government some years

[113] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 106.

in superintending the building of Marine Hospitals and Custom Houses on the upper Miss. river.[114]

Captain Parker served the 7th Division well during the final days of the siege at Vicksburg, directing the digging of trenches and the placing of gun batteries, often under heavy enemy fire.[115] Grant was sufficiently impressed by his performance at Vicksburg that he had Parker join his staff as an adjutant on September 18, 1863, joining another old friend from Galena, John A. Rawlins.[116] Captain Parker went with Grant and his forces to Chattanooga, Tennessee, in October. The purpose of this campaign was to relieve the beleaguered Union forces under General George Thomas holding the city, who were besieged by General Braxton Bragg's Confederate army.



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This hand-drawn map, included in Parker's letter home to his sister, displays with an engineer's eye the topography of the area around Chattanooga and the Tennessee River. Bragg's Confederates held a commanding position on high ground on three sides of the city, before the Union attacks of Nov. 24-25 shattered the Confederate line.

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[114] Ulysses S. Grant, *To Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas*, June 25, 1863. Mississippi State University Libraries, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 08: April 1-July 6, 1863*.
[115] Parker and Hollcroft, "Ely S. Parker – Man and Mason," 240.
[116] Parker, The Life of General Ely S. Parker, 106.
[117] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Caroline G. Parker*, November 21, 1863. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

While in Chattanooga, Parker wrote a very long and descriptive letter to his sister Caroline back at Tonawanda on November 21, 1863. After discussing his father's illness and apparent recovery as well as the poor crop yield on the Parker farm, Parker goes into detail about his situation in Chattanooga and that of the Union Army. "The rebel army are south, east, and west of us," he wrote, "In fact, they almost surround us completely."[118] Parker estimated the Confederate strength as around 60,000, their left flank anchored on the high peak of Lookout Mountain from which Confederate artillery fired incessantly. In spite of the heavy odds, Parker was confident of victory. "We intend to thrash them soundly and give the rebellion such a blow as to stagger its longer continuance in this region."[119]

Parker also got to give his opinion on the local residents of the region: "The country people of the entire south, as far as I have seen, do not live as well or as comfortable as the Tonawanda Indians." He is speaking of the depredations of war in this case, but Parker's attitude of superiority soon becomes evident in the way he describes his observations. With regards to the white residents, Parker claims that their log cabins are inferior to the dwellings of the Senecas, that they are often poorly dressed in homemade clothing without the benefits of northern-manufactured goods, and were, in Parker's words, "poor white trash" who speak English badly and are stalwart in their devotion to the Confederate cause.[120] As we have seen in his letter on the local residents of Galena, Parker was never one to pass up a chance to display his sense of superiority.

However, he is no more charitable to the local freed slaves of the area, writing about how they have begun to occupy many fine houses belonging to wealthier residents who had since fled

[118] Ely S. Parker, Letter to Caroline G. Parker, November 21, 1863. American Philosophical Society, Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Hauptman, *The Iroquois in the Civil War*, 53.

Chattanooga, in the same breath that he describes the widespread hunger and devastation of the land. Using racist language typical of the day for white people, north and south, Parker remarked how "the fine dresses that white ladies once bedecked themselves with now hang shabbily upon the ungainly figure of some huge, dilapidated negro wench."[121] Historian Laurence Hauptman, writing on Parker's elitism and racism, claims that "Parker, a man of limited wealth and always in debt, identified with the white planter class of the South whose lifeways were being shattered by the American Civil War more than either the lower white classes who largely composed the Confederate armies or the black freedmen."[122] Parker does certainly lament the privations faced by the white upper class far more than those of the poor, white or black. He was proud to be a part of both the Seneca aristocracy and the educated professional class of the northern states, and he evidently did not think much of the vast majority of the people who populated this area.

However, there was one figure native to the area that did command Parker's respect. John Ross, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, had previously lived mere miles from Parker's quarters, in "...the ancient homes of the Cherokees."[123] Ross, whose multi-decade fight against the removal of his people from their ancestral lands mirrored the Tonawandas' own struggle, was a hero to Parker, who mentioned Ross more than once during his time in the South.[124]

Writing to his brother Nicholson, Parker found time to ruminate more on war itself.

> You at the north who are out of the reach of the noise, excitement and hardships of army life, cannot begin to realize what war is. As I have said, here lie two great

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[121] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Caroline G. Parker*, November 21, 1863. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*
[122] Hauptman, *The Iroquois in the Civil War*, 53.
[123] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Caroline G. Parker*, November 21, 1863. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*
[124] Hauptman, *The Iroquois in the Civil War*, 53.

> armies within sight of each other. Their whole study and object is to destroy one another.[125]

Parker went on to describe the neverending cacophony of rifle and cannon fire that is heard at the front lines every day. He emphasized to his brother that in spite of the constant danger, he is never afraid. "I would go into a regular battle as calmly as I would go to my meal when hungry," he claimed, and later said, "I fear no rebel bullet, shot or shell in a fair fight."[126] However, in the event of his death, Parker instructed his brother that all the property that he owned would be divided between himself, Caroline, and their father, and if William died before then, just between the two of them. Why the other Parker siblings are to be left out is not specified, but Nicholson and Caroline had been closer to him than the others at least since the 1850s, evidenced by their regular correspondence. William's illness is also considered.

From November 23 to 25, a series of Union attacks along the length of the front line took place. The battles culminated in a breach of the Confederate defenses in the center of Missionary Ridge on the final day due to a dramatic uphill assault by General George Thomas's Army of the Cumberland, prompting a rapid retreat by General Bragg's Confederates. Captain Parker was in the thick of the fighting at Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge, at one point having to ride half a mile under intense enemy fire to deliver a message to General Joseph Hooker.[127] Parker described the battles around Chattanooga in great detail in two more letters, one to Caroline on December 2, 1863, and the other to Nicholson on January 25, 1864. These letters, among the longest pieces of Parker's entire surviving correspondence, overflow with detailed descriptions of troop movements and various actions that would make them a valuable primary source for any

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[125] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Nicholson H. Parker*, November 18, 1863. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*
[126] Ibid.
[127] Hauptman, *The Iroquois in the Civil War*, 56.

scholarly history of the campaign. They also show Parker's place on the battlefield as a member of Grant's staff: close enough to the action to hear the whistle of the shells, yet also close enough to the center of command to maintain an understanding of the larger tactical picture. As a staff officer, Parker was a conduit between both.

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This photograph of General Grant and his staff was taken at City Point, Virginia, some time in the summer of 1864. Cpt. Ely S. Parker is seated off to the right. (According to Arthur C. Parker, whose book this picture also appears in, this picture was taken at Cold Harbor, Virginia, in May 1864, contradicting the Library of Congress's description.)

Before, during, and after the major fighting at Chattanooga, Parker was battling a serious illness, potentially dysentery, that caused him to lose thirty pounds, as he wrote to Nicholson.[129] Arthur C. Parker recounts how his great uncle was prescribed whiskey and quinine, a concoction that made Parker anxious and aggressive, even towards his friends. The effects of the alcohol

[128] *Grant and staff at City Point*, Summer 1864. Library of Congress.
[129] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Nicholson H. Parker*, January 25, 1864. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

were enough to turn Parker into a teetotaler following the war, and he even refused prescriptions of alcohol from doctors later in life.[130]

Captain Parker's unique ethnic background soon began to draw attention in the army. Known as "the Indian" or "Grant's Indian," he was eminently recognizable among Grant's large staff for his stocky figure and the dark color of his skin. Aside from the words of General James H. Wilson, inspector general of the Union Army, Ely Parker did not experience much overt racism during his time in the army, and especially not from common soldiers, who deferred to him as much as they did to white officers.[131] Instead, Parker was a unique personality, well-liked, and friendly, and was known by many nicknames. An Illinois politician, writing a letter to Grant in 1864, asked the general to "Remember me to [John A.] Rawlins, [Theodore S.] Bowers, the 'Big Injun', and the other good friends around you."[132]

The early part of 1864 marked a profound shift in Union strategy. Grant was promoted to Lieutenant General and gained command of all Union armies in the field. For the first time in the war, the forces of the United States would pursue a unified strategy towards winning the war once and for all. The main Union effort would come in Virginia, with General George Meade's Army of the Potomac facing off against General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Grant was determined that once his armies had begun their campaigns, they would not stop for anything until they had crushed the rebellion.

Parker went east with Grant, towards the theater of war that had been the most difficult for the Union forces. But in between his work as a staff officer, his attention was taken with another personal matter. William Parker died in April 1864, likely from the illness that had been

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[130] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 110.
[131] Hauptman, *The Iroquois in the Civil War*, 52.
[132] J. Russell Jones, *Letter to Ulysses S. Grant*, April 28, 1864. Mississippi State University Libraries, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 10: January 1-May 31, 1864*.

affecting him on and off for the past few years. Parker received the news via a telegram from Caroline, and although he was not able to make it back for the funeral, he told his brother Nicholson that "It is a heavy blow to me. I know it is for Carrie. Do what you can to lighten her grief."[133] An obituary in a Buffalo newspaper published that May said of the old chief and war veteran:

> William Parker was a man of commanding size, and of a noble and dignified presence. He possessed much good sense and discrimination, and was noted for incorruptible honesty. He was a true man, and a faithful friend and adviser of his race, and was the associate and compeer of those other honest and true chiefs, Jemmy Johnson and John Blacksmith. In the long struggles of the Tonawanda band against the Ogden Land Company, the modest and calm old chief, Parker, was always to be relied upon, and he lived to see his band the owners in fee of some 8,000 acres of valuable land and with a large surplus invested for their benefit.[134]

Ely Parker's father had clearly rubbed off on him in many ways. The old chief had lived to see his people victorious in the fight for their land, but not long enough to see his son come home from the war that he had been so reluctant to send him off to. Yet even as he grieved, Ely Parker continued to fight his war. "Before this reaches you," he wrote to Nicholson, "we shall be fighting all along our lines."[135] General Grant had made it clear to the country that this fight was to the finish. "I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer," he had said.[136]

The beginning of Grant's offensive, the Overland Campaign, was marked by some of the bloodiest and most brutal fighting of the war at battles like the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court

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[133] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Nicholson H. Parker*, April 27, 1864. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

[134] *Buffalo Newspaper*, May 1864. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

[135] Ely S. Parker, *Letter to Nicholson H. Parker*, April 27, 1864. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

[136] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 111.

House, and Cold Harbor, with appallingly high casualty rates on both sides and neither Grant nor Lee backing down. Much of Parker's work during this time was in transcribing orders and delivering them. Arthur C. Parker states that Grant often deferred to Parker in times of stress, appreciating his grasp of the English language and neat handwriting, and would often simply sign his name without checking the orders themselves.[137] Not only was Parker used to desk-bound work as a result of his engineering career, he had achieved his goal of a near total mastery of the English language. No longer would military officers mock his accent and grammar as had happened up at Grand River those many years ago. Instead, the commander of the many armies of the United States trusted Parker's command of language to such an extent that he did not even need to read the orders he had been dictating. For white officers of the Union Army, many of whom had never met a Native American and knew little outside of the commonly repeated stereotypes, Parker must have made an impact. For some, he dispelled their assumptions about Natives, but still others insisted on projecting those stereotypes on him.

Parker's skill as a transcriber was matched by his bravery and coolness under fire. Arthur C. Parker took down a story from the words of his great uncle, relayed later in his life to some of his friends. This recollection takes place during the Battle of the Wilderness (May 3-5, 1864), and is one of the few extended quotes from Ely Parker himself that appears in the biography.

> As a matter of fact I was never concerned about getting killed in open battle," he said. "Bullets were flying through the air constantly but I got used to them. I even grew hardened to the sight of the dead and wounded on the field. I did not believe I was to be killed by a bullet and though I was under fire many a time I came through the war without a wound. My coat and hat got a few holes. When I was a young man I was fond of hunting and learned the art of woodcraft in all its minute details. I could track a deer even over the leaves. I developed the instinct to feel

[137] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 115.

> the presence of game or danger. Perhaps I had the good will of the spirits. This was useful to me oftentimes during battle or in the presence of danger. I distinctly remember the time while we were riding together—the whole staff, at Spottsylvania [sic]. It was one day when General Grant led out for a ride with General Meade; Rawlins and I were in the rear and [Cyrus B.] Comstock was leading. I noticed that we were riding into the rebel line. I said to Rawlins, 'Where is the General going?' He answered, 'I don't know.' 'If he doesn't look out,' I told him, 'he will be in the rebel lines.' Then Rawlins roared out: 'Hey! General, do you know where you are?' (He always treated Grant like a dog.) 'No,' he replied, 'Comstock, do you?' 'No,' answered Comstock, 'but Parker says if you don't look out we will ride plumb into the rebel lines!' 'Parker,' called Grant, 'do you know where we are?' I answered, 'Yes, General.' Grant then quickly said, 'Well, then lead.' I put spurs to my black horse and galloped off in another direction and they [rode] full tilt after me." After the battle I met a rebel captain whom we had captured and he said to me, 'Colonel, I wish to ask you about a certain incident. The other day I saw General Grant with General Meade and a party of which you were one riding into our lines. My men wanted to fire on you, but I said, 'Hold on, they will ride in and we can capture the whole lot.' Then I saw you ride up and say something to Grant and then your whole party galloped off in haste. You were within forty rods of us and we hoped to get you all in the next five minutes.[138]

A few things are evident from the way in which Parker recounts this event from his military service. Firstly, after his rather typical boasting of his fearless temperament, Parker draws attention to his experiences hunting and crafting as a boy at Grand River and gives those formative years credit for his ability to sense danger and save General Grant from capture or death. Native service in the armed forces had a long history, but most Native servicemen were recruited specifically as scouts, as it was assumed that that was where their talents lay. Parker

[138] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 111-112.

had broken stereotypes with his sophisticated engineering and staff work, but in invoking this older conception of Natives as natural hunters and scouts he may have been trying to maintain his sense of cultural identity in the midst of such a homogenizing institution as the army. If some, such as those who had given him his many nicknames, were determined to see him as an Indian above all else, he could leverage the positive ideas associated with that archetype. Additionally, this story was clearly one he was proud of. If Grant had won the Civil War, and Parker had saved Grant, Parker's own part in the final victory of the Union armies was beyond question.

After the bloody and indecisive Overland Campaign, Lee's army withdrew behind the defenses of Petersburg, Virginia. Grant's forces were unable to take the city, and thus moved to surround it. The nearly year-long siege that ensued was known for its prolonged stalemate, and the trench warfare that later came to be seen as a grim portent of the warfare that would later take place on the Western Front of World War I. Grant had an ambitious plan to break the deadlock and take the city, but the Battle of the Crater that ensued was a disaster. Thousands of Union soldiers were killed for no gain, with bungling Union commanders as much to blame for the slaughter as Confederate bullets. A letter from one of Grant's other staff officers—in which many of the staff offer their thoughts on the debacle—gives a rare look at Parker's own thoughts at this point in the war, when his recovered correspondence home begins to dry up. "I have had the biggest disgust on and dare not express myself on the Potomac Army," he is quoted as saying.[139] If Parker had not restrained himself, he might have found himself using the curses he so abjured.

On August 26, 1864, Grant wrote to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton requesting a Lieutenant Colonel's commission for Parker. Another of Grant's men, Colonel William Rowley,

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[139] George K. Leet, *Letter to William R. Rowley*, August 9, 1864. Mississippi State University Libraries, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 11: June 1-August 15, 1864*.

had been honorably discharged on account of his health, and Grant saw Parker as the best man for the job.[140] Four days later, Parker became Grant's personal military secretary, with the aforementioned rank.[141] To have gone from being emphatically told that his services were not wanted to serving as the right hand man of the highest-ranking general in the Union Army in little more than two years was impressive indeed. The changing circumstances of the war and friends in high places had cleared the way for Parker, but none of it would be possible without his drive, intelligence, and competence at anything he set his mind to.

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[140] Ulysses S. Grant, *Letter to Edwin M. Stanton*, August 26, 1864. Mississippi State University Libraries, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 12: August 16-November 15, 1864*.
[141] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 116.

Chapter 7: We Are All Americans

Parker stayed by Grant's side during the next several months, transcribing and delivering orders, working the telegraph, and going with him from his headquarters at City Point to the front lines and back regularly. In the winter of 1864 to 1865, a frequent guest at Grant's headquarters was none other than President Abraham Lincoln. Grant, Lincoln, and his staff often shared a dinner table, and Arthur C. Parker claims that Parker and the president had many conversations, often on the subject of the country's Native American policy.

> [Parker] outlined his plans for the betterment of conditions, condemned the treaty system and pleaded for the education of the young. Lincoln was most sympathetic, and said that he knew the red man had suffered awful injustice which he hoped the nation some day would requite.[142]

Parker, as a result of his life experiences, had firm opinions on this subject. It is more than likely that his articulation of his ideas to remedy these injustices made an impression on Grant, and was considered when he made his cabinet decisions four years later.

Eventually, the Union Army got the upper hand at Petersburg. The first few days of April 1865 brought victory after victory for the Union forces: General Philip Sheridan (moving on orders transcribed by Parker) cut one of the Confederates' last lifelines at Five Forks, and the next day the rest of the Union forces assaulted and broke through Confederate lines at Petersburg. Robert E. Lee frantically pulled out his army, leaving both Petersburg and Richmond to fall to the advancing Union troops. Lee's battered and severely weakened Army of Northern Virginia was finally cornered at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, on April 9, 1865. With no hope of escape, Lee finally agreed to meet with Grant to discuss terms of surrender.

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[142] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 120.

The following event has entered into American myth. More than that, it is the single event most associated with Ely S. Parker throughout his long and eventful life, a single moment when he steps onto the national stage to be recorded in the history books. If the average American knows anything whatsoever about Parker, chances are high it is his presence at the surrender of Robert E. Lee at Appomattox. It is important, then, to not consider this the centerpiece of his life as many have, but as one more formative experience in a life full of them.

Lee chose the farmhouse of Appomattox resident Wilmer McLean to hold the negotiations. Present in the room when all had arrived, in addition to Grant and Lee, were Colonels Theodore S. Bowers and Orville E. Babcock and Lieutenant Colonels Ely S. Parker and Horace Porter, all of Grant's staff, and Generals Philip Sheridan and Edward O. C. Ord. Lee was only accompanied by Colonel Charles Marshall, his personal military secretary.[143] The difference in appearance and background between Grant and Lee has often been emphasized when this story is told. Lee, the tall, old, stoic Virginian aristocrat, wearing his finest uniform and ceremonial sword, contrasts starkly with Grant, the once-impoverished son of a tanner in his mud-spattered boots and common enlisted man's jacket.[144] In this way, Parker is occasionally treated as an accessory to Grant, his presence evidence of the general's forward-thinking nature and lack of pretensions.[145]

When the pleasantries were finished, Grant called for Parker to draft the terms of surrender, which Parker wrote in the manifold order book he always carried. When Parker was done, he brought it over to Grant, who directed a few minor changes. Parker wrote the final draft in ink, pocketing the original copy. While Parker was writing the final terms of surrender and Lee's secretary Marshall was writing his letter of acceptance, Lee was introduced by Grant to the

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[143] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 129.
[144] Malcolm Venville, "Freedom's Champion," *Grant*. History, 2020, 37:26.
[145] Ibid.

members of his staff. Lieutenant Colonel Porter, in his own memoirs, recounted that Lee was surprised to see Parker upon being introduced to him, initially believing him to be an African-American. However, Parker himself always "indignantly denied" this.[146] Further dispelling the myth, Arthur C. Parker later wrote that Lee "...knew enough about the frontier not to have made this mistake."[147] Both Parkers disliked the idea of this event being reduced to an almost comic misunderstanding. They preferred the dignified and momentous exchange between Parker and Lee. This would be the moment that wrote Parker into the larger story of American history. Here it is in Parker's own words, relayed by his great nephew:

> After Lee had stared at me for a moment, he extended his hand and said, "I am glad to see one real American here." I shook his hand and said, "We are all Americans."[148]

It was a gesture of reconciliation and magnanimity, certainly. But it must have meant something else for Parker personally. He had been told time and again that he was a ward of the state, essentially a child under the care of the government and not a citizen with the rights, privileges, obligations, and, most importantly, the identity of any other American. Through a combination of hard work and luck, he was not merely observing but actively participating in a pivotal moment of American history, wearing the uniform of the United States Army. When Lee said that Parker was a "real American," it may sound like a gesture of respect, and it may have been intended as such. But regardless of how it was intended, it served to separate Parker from the other men in the room, consign him to an alternative identity. By saying "we are all Americans," in addition to embracing the reconciliation of former enemies that Lincoln and Grant had already agreed would be their policy, Parker was able to count himself among their

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[146] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 133.
[147] Parker and Hollcroft, "Ely S. Parker – Man and Mason.", 244.
[148] Ibid, 133.

number, no less American and no different. Additionally, when considering Parker's words to Lee, it may be useful to recall Professor Hauptman's previously quoted passage about Parker's identification with the white planter class.

Grant and Lee would meet the next day to finalize the surrender documents, but for all intents and purposes the war in the Eastern Theater was over. Lee's hungry and exhausted soldiers received very lenient terms, as much a result of a fear of a post-surrender resurgence of violence as it was of Grant's personal generosity.[149]

Parker's days after Appomattox were spent doing administrative work for Grant and the army. Though Lee had surrendered, it would be a while longer before the other Confederate armies in the field followed suit. On April 15, 1865, at Ford's Theater in Washington, President Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, sending the nation into a period of intense shock and mourning. Parker, who had met and spoke with Lincoln, was particularly affected.[150] However, the war was more or less over, and so was Lieutenant Colonel Parker's part in it. Concluding his chapter on Parker's part at Appomattox, Arthur C. Parker has this to say to sum up his great-uncle's service:

> Thus the Indian whose enlistment had been refused because the war was "a white man's war," after all was called upon for service. Thus it happened that the words of Secretary Seward came back, "It is an affair in which the Indian is not called to act. The fight must be settled by the white men alone. Go home, cultivate your farm and *we will settle our own troubles without any Indian aid!*" And yet the Iroquois Indians alone sent three hundred of the flower of their race to battle in this white man's war. They gave men whom the army records show, "for stature, physical fitness and endurance had no equal in the entire army." The Iroquois Indians gave two army surgeons to the Union cause, and provided the military

[149] Venville, "Freedom's Champion," *Grant*, 40:35.
[150] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 142.

> engineer, the adjutant-general, the military secretary whose record we have related. Thus, after all, it must be said that it was in the handwriting of an Iroquois sachem, and an Indian that the two warring factions of the white race were finally united. And as a reward for his services, he was declared competent, even though an Indian, to become a citizen and a voter.[151]

Arthur C. Parker's words merit analysis. His depiction of Parker's service, and especially his rendition of Seward's words, must be understood in the context of the era they were written in. The early twentieth century saw the nation reckon with the trauma of the Civil War in a new way. Historian and Yale University Professor David Blight's book *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* reveals how around the turn of the century white Americans accepted a mythologized version of the war that focused on the tragedy of a war of "brother versus brother" and the bravery and heroism of the soldiers who fought on it on both sides. In this sanitized version of the Civil War, in which the Lost Cause mythology quickly took root, the ideological differences that caused the war are ignored and African-Americans are written out of the story entirely.[152] Central to the newly mythologized war is the unspoken concept of a "white man's war." We can thus see why Arthur C. Parker, writing in 1919, was so keen to disprove this narrative not only with his great-uncle's service, but of that of the Senecas and the Iroquois more generally. Ely was also not the only Parker to fight in the war. His brother Isaac Newton Parker served in a majority-Iroquois company of the 132nd New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, fought in several battles in North Carolina, and ended the war as a sergeant.[153]

Parker had his part to play in the war's aftermath. He received one final promotion, that of brevet Brigadier General. (Brevet ranks are titles granted for meritorious conduct, though they

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[151] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 140-141.
[152] "Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory," Yale University Department of African American Studies, n.d., https://afamstudies.yale.edu/publications/race-and-reunion-civil-war-american-memory.
[153] Hauptman, *The Iroquois in the Civil War*, 25-38.

do not necessarily carry the official status and pay grade of the rank itself. These were common during the Civil War.) The promotion was back-dated to April 9, 1865, the date of Lee's surrender.[154] After a "victory tour" during which Parker accompanied Grant in a number of parades, ceremonies, and celebrations around the country, Parker received his new assignment late in 1865. For the Native nations out west, the war had been a divisive and ugly affair, every bit the "brother versus brother" war so often imagined by popular historians of the conflict east of the Mississippi. General Parker was assigned as part of a team of Union officers, Office of Indian Affairs employees, and various diplomats headed by Commissioner of Indian Affairs D. N. Cooley. Their task was to stop the violence and negotiate new treaties with those factions (most of these nations had split during the war) that had aligned with the Confederacy.[155]

At Fort Smith, Arkansas, Parker and the team were joined by representatives of the Wyandots, Shawnees, Osages, Quapaws, Cherokees, Creeks, Seminoles, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Wichitas, Comanches, and even some of those displaced Senecas living in Kansas. Parker's time at Fort Smith is notable for marking his first foray into the federal government's policy decisions regarding the Native nations of the west. According to historian John C. Winters,

> Parker essentially had two jobs. One was as an army officer and a diplomat, and the other was a civilized Seneca who set an example for the gathered Native American diplomats, many of whom, a report detailed, were not just "uncivilized" but not even "full blooded…red men of the forest." Many showed a "strong intermixture of white, and a lesser of negro blood being very apparent." Some, like Parker, "seated themselves quietly on benches, after the manner of orderly American citizens," but many others "bore every emblem of the wild Indian of the past."[156]

[154] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 142.
[155] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 80-81.
[156] Ibid, 81.

Ever the cultural ambassador, Parker had at once to convince Native peoples out west of the government's benevolent intentions, and simultaneously to convince racist whites back east that the "civilization" of the Natives was possible through his own personal example. Parker, through his dress, manner of speech, and obvious intellect, was counted as a "civilized" Native. He was still recognizably Native and never fully gave up his Seneca identity, but the way in which he presented himself allowed him to be counted among the "civilized" people of the nation.

Chapter 8: Peacemaker

Parker continued doing various duties in the western states well into 1866, before returning to Washington, D.C. That July, he was officially mustered out of his volunteer service and commissioned into the Regular United States Army, given the rank of Second Lieutenant in the 2nd Cavalry Regiment. The next year, he would be promoted to First Lieutenant.

In the fall of 1867, Parker announced the news of his engagement. He, thirty-nine years old, was going to marry Minnie Orton Sackett, the eighteen-year-old daughter of prominent Washington citizens. Marriages between Natives and whites had been controversial, especially those between Native men and white women. However, those who believed in the "civilizing" of the Natives viewed such marriages in a positive light, as contributing to the assimilation of Native men.[157] Additionally, Parker's place in Washington society, especially his close proximity to the war hero General Grant, meant that this choice of marriage had more supporters than detractors. At the ceremony on December 17, 1867, many members of the elite class of Washington, which had snubbed the "savage brave" twenty years ago, filed into the Church of the Epiphany. Included was Grant himself, who was to serve as best man. Yet there was one person missing: Ely Parker himself.[158]

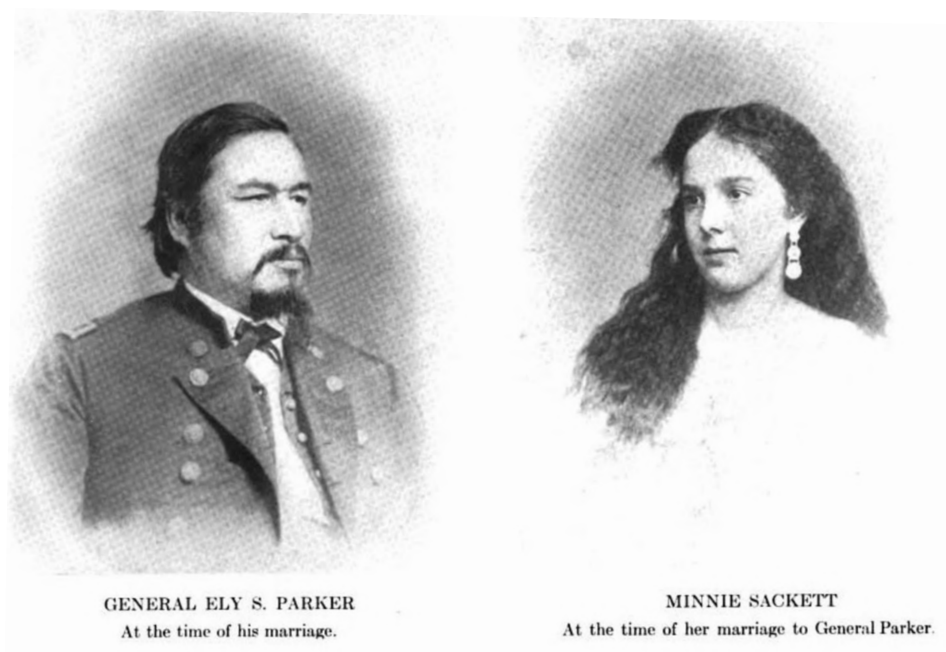
No sooner had Parker's bride-to-be left the altar where he had abandoned her than the tabloid gossip machine began to run wild with stories. Newspapers reported that he had drowned in the Potomac or eloped with another woman in Buffalo, among other rumors.[159] A few days later, Parker appeared again. He gave no public comment on the reason for his disappearance, but a private explanation to Minnie herself. Though his exact words will never be known, it was

[157] Margaret D. Jacobs. "The Eastmans and the Luhans: Interracial Marriage between White Women and Native American Men, 1875-1935." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 2002, 29-54.
[158] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 145.
[159] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 38:57.

evidently enough for her. They were married shortly after, this time in a much more private ceremony. As Arthur C. Parker put it,

> It is probable that the fuss and feathers of a "civilized marriage ceremony" had proven too much for the simple nature of the red man; so reads the account as the public knows it.

Arthur C. Parker disdainfully paraphrases some white theories on Parker's disappearance, reliant as they are on commonly-repeated Native stereotypes of incompatibility with civilized proceedings. He then puts forward an alternative explanation: an unnamed rival, potentially one infatuated with Minnie, had drugged the unfortunate general on the day of his wedding to thwart the marriage.[160] Just how credible this story is, we will likely never know.


GENERAL ELY S. PARKER
At the time of his marriage.

MINNIE SACKETT
At the time of her marriage to General Parker.

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These photographs of Ely Parker and Minnie Sackett, taken around the time of their wedding, show the uniformed general approaching middle age and his bride having barely reached legal adulthood, an age gap that would likely be highly criticized today but came secondarily to the interracial aspect when it occurred.

[160] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 146.
[161] Ibid, 147.

Parker's duties increased during this period. He was tapped by the War Department to take part in more peace delegations, and the more trips out west he made, the more he became convinced that the system and the government's policy were both inefficient and unfair. The violence that was now breaking out with increased ferocity, between white settlers and the United States Army on one side and Native peoples on the other, was entirely unnecessary, Parker believed, and the fault lay with both shortsighted government policy and Office of Indian Affairs corruption.[162] Parker, however, would get a chance to put his theories into practice soon enough, as his old commander during the war Ulysses S. Grant was going to run for president. Parker took to the campaign trail along with his old friend Rawlins, trying to win people over to Grant by answering their letters.[163]

Grant won the presidency in 1868, and he immediately selected his old aide Parker as the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Parker believed that he could turn the government's failing western policy around, but his tenure as Commissioner would be spent mired in bureaucratic red tape as much as it would be actually effecting change. Parker's first move, before he could change actual policy, was to reform the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA). The OIA was known in Washington for the blatant corruption and nepotism of its members, a system known as "the Indian ring."[164] Arthur C. Parker describes the corruption endemic to the OIA:

> The whole "bureau system" was graft-ridden. The goods placed in Government warehouses for Indians were stolen or replaced with inferior material. Contractors who had no conscience were continually foisting upon the Government worthless cloth and food. Cattle-dealers who were paid for delivering "beef on foot" reaped a rich harvest of gold. One of the schemes which they successfully worked was to drive their consignment of cows onto a reservation, get the agent's receipt, wait

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[162] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 146.
[163] Ibid, 147.
[164] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 83.

> until the beef had been distributed to the Indians and then either steal, or buy them back for a trinket or a few pennies—twenty-five cents in most cases; then drive them on to the next agency and deliver them there, only to repeat the operation. Men like this had money to defend themselves with and were seldom caught.[165]

The system was broken. Government employees and contractors were making money; the Natives were suffering and these men were profiting off it. One can see why Parker was so eager to enact sweeping reform. Parker, who believed in the reservation system as a basis for peace, saw the corruption, mismanagement, and negligence of those running the reservation programs as the main instigator of the violence. It was greed that made voluntary participation of Natives in the government's civilizing programs impossible, giving them no choice but armed resistance.

Ely Parker was sworn in as Commissioner of Indian Affairs on April 26, 1869, and was quickly approved by the Senate, becoming the first person of Indigenous background to hold that office.[166] With Grant's help, he set to work reforming the institution. Grant and Parker worked together to create the Board of Indian Commissioners (BIC), an oversight committee that would have the authority to control the use of appropriated funds.[167] This would clean up the corruption problem and allow Parker to consider policy.

Parker's philosophy was in many ways colored by his personal experiences growing up in Tonawanda at a time of extreme anxiety for the Seneca people. First among his priorities was to establish a clear legal status for Native Americans living in United States territory.[168] It is not clear from Parker's writings just what this status would be, but the equally vague and restrictive nature of the "ward of the state" status, under which Parker had struggled, needed to be changed.

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[165] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 151.
[166] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 83.
[167] Ibid, 83.
[168] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 152-153.

Additionally, the treaty system was inherently flawed. Just as the Treaty of Buffalo Creek had seen certain Seneca chiefs sign away land they did not have the right to give, Parker was convinced that the treaties being negotiated with the western nations were similarly illegitimate.[169]

Next was his attitude towards the "civilization" of the Natives. Parker has often been represented as a man who believed in total assimilation into white society for Natives, for them to abandon their culture. This is a misrepresentation and an oversimplification. Parker did ultimately believe in a process of "...the humanization, civilization and Christianization of the Indians," as he mentioned in his first letter to the BIC upon taking office, but the man who routinely spoke his original language, carried the responsibility of a sachem, and was intensely proud of his people's history was not interested in the same type of assimilation that some whites had put forward. Historian John C. Winters terms Commissioner Parker's concepts as "selective assimilationism."[170] Central to this model was citizenship, Christianization, education, and the adoption of a settled agricultural lifestyle, but one that maintained Native autonomy and agency. Natives would adopt the virtues of white culture while "shunning the vices of the white man," and assimilate on their own terms and at their own pace.[171] According to Winters,

> Parker proved during his short tenure to support policies that rejected the ideas of those "reformers" who were "less concerned about the Indians' dignity and self-determination than their submissiveness and conformity." In that sense, while he agreed with the majority of federal officials that Indian confinement to reservations led to economic and political conformity and the suppression of their wild and warlike predilections, he also believed that these were matters over which Indigenous peoples themselves should have some control.[172]

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[169] Parker and Hollcroft, "Ely S. Parker – Man and Mason.", 245.
[170] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 82.
[171] Ibid, 82-84.
[172] Ibid, 83.

A critical focus of Parker's during this time was the reduction of military action taken against the tribes on the plains. Such a reduction would make peace more likely, as well as saving the government millions in expenses. Yet even despite his efforts to curb such violence, the killings continued. In the Montana Territory late in 1869, a violent altercation between local white settlers and a group of Piegan Blackfeet resulted in the death of one of the settlers. General Philip Sheridan ordered troops in, and in January 1870, the soldiers attacked a Piegan camp on the Marias River, killing over 170 men, women, and children. Major Eugene M. Baker (of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Parker's former unit), who had led the attack and had even shot a Piegan man coming to assure him of his people's friendship beforehand, was investigated in Washington after news of the massacre spread.[173] Commissioner Parker voiced his support for Baker and defended his actions.[174] For all his desire for peace, Parker was still a former soldier. His experience serving in the Union Army had led him to form a highly positive outlook on the military, and he was far more likely to defend the institution than to criticize it. As he saw it, his enemies were white businessmen and their Washington allies, not the U.S. Army. If the Army did something, Parker was predisposed to believe it to have been necessary.

Parker's plans for peace saw some successes, if not unqualified ones, in defending Native American rights against the avarice of white businessmen and their allies in Washington. In May 1870, Parker received a delegation of Oglala and Brulé Lakota Sioux headed by Chiefs Red Cloud and Spotted Tail. They wanted the right to a reservation on their ancestral homeland of the Platte River country with the ability to trade at Fort Laramie, which they believed were contained within the terms of the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie they had signed, and they refused to be sent

[173] Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (Open Road Media, 2012), 395-396.
[174] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 43:55.

300 miles east to a reservation on the Missouri River.[175] When, in Washington, it was revealed that the treaty contained no such provision and that the Lakota had been lied to, the disgusted chiefs prepared to leave with the knowledge that they had been cheated out of their land. Parker knew he had to act, and so compelled Red Cloud and Spotted Tail to come back for one final meeting. Parker identified a loophole in the treaty that gave the Lakota Sioux rights to the Powder River country as *hunting grounds*, and there were no rules to say they could not live on their hunting grounds. Red Cloud shook the hand of Donehogawa, his peer as a chief, and said,

> Yesterday, when I saw the treaty and all the false things in it I was mad, and I suppose it made you the same…Now I am pleased…We have thirty-two nations and have a council house, just the same as you have. We held a council before we came here, and the demand I have made upon you is from the chiefs I left behind. We are all alike.[176]

In spite of such victories, most of Parker's ambitious plans to revolutionize the ways in which the government dealt with Native Americans would never come to fruition. The corruption that he had tried so hard to stamp out would come back for him. In January 1871, Parker returned from a trip out west to the Missouri River, where he was visiting Native communities in the Dakotas. Upon his return to Washington, he was met by an accusation by William Welsh, the chairman of the BIC. Parker had, during his trip, signed a contract with a shipping company to distribute goods to the Sioux communities in Dakota without having consulted the BIC. Welsh immediately jumped to the conclusion that Parker had been fleecing the government and lobbied for an investigation against him.[177] If there was ever any doubt that

[175] Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 392-394.
[176] Ibid, 414-415.
[177] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois,"* 82.

racial prejudice played a role in Welsh's decision, Welsh openly lamented that President Grant had put in office "one who is but a remove from barbarism."[178]

The ensuing investigation and hearings in the house were prolonged, nasty affairs, and they receive a lengthy depiction in Arthur C. Parker's biography. A reader can feel the anger and indignation in Arthur C. Parker's words at the government's racist mistreatment of his great-uncle. Parker's own public response to Welsh, five printed pages long, justified his actions by invoking the OIA's policy under his tenure. Parker believed that the success of the reservation system was contingent on government assistance to the tribes who were moving onto these reservations. If the government failed to deliver the supplies it had promised, the Natives would have no choice but to leave. Parker's words also recall the violence of the Civil War and invoke the public's fear of a mass Native uprising.

> The fact was patent to the Indian Office, and all familiar with our relations to [the Sioux], that unless something was done to continue their subsistence after the first of July, that they would very soon thereafter abandon the agencies around which they had located, return to the plains, and again commence their predatory habits. The Indian agents then in Washington stated positively that, in the case of failure to continue supplies, the Indians would commence depredating, and perhaps inaugurate a general Indian war. Such a result was not to be desired.[179]

Welsh and his allies brought thirteen charges against Commissioner Parker to be investigated by a committee of the House of Representatives, but Parker welcomed such an investigation. The committee found absolutely nothing indicating any wrongdoing, and according to Arthur C. Parker, "every one of their charges was disproven by the records of the Interior Department or the Indian office. The 'bad Indian' could not be roped and branded with

[178] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 155.
[179] Ely S. Parker. *Report*. January 12, 1871. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

the title 'bad.'"[180] The committee pronounced Parker innocent of all charges, and stated that any mistakes made were the fault of a flawed system that Parker had inherited.[181]

If Parker believed that the committee's verdict upholding his innocence had brought an end to his troubles, he was mistaken. The initial charge leveled by William Welsh resulted in "an avalanche of public accusations" into the OIA.[182] The BIC, whose creation Parker had supported to curtail corruption, had assumed so much power that they had stripped his office of much of its authority. Critics of Parker never missed a chance to inject racial animosity into their judgments of him, claiming that Grant had selected Parker solely because of his heritage and that "any number of 'pale-faces' would have done better."[183] This new, intensely hostile working environment was too much for Parker to bear. Parker tendered his resignation to President Grant, his old commander and political benefactor, on June 29, 1871, in a very personal letter. He claimed that "the Commissioner of Indian Affairs is now a mere honorary title and his duties that of a clerk to a Board of Indian Commissioners operating wholly outside of and almost independent of the Indian Office."[184]

Arthur C. Parker devotes several pages to protesting his great-uncle's innocence and hard work, and lamenting the injustice and prejudice with which he was treated. Ely S. Parker's resignation took effect on August 1, 1871, and his time as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, with all its hopes and aspirations, was over. Parker's earlier victory of peace between the government and the Lakota Sioux was also short-lived. Five years later, in 1876, the United States went to war in the Black Hills, annexing Sioux land and forcing the Sioux onto reservations.

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[180] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 155.
[181] Ibid, 156.
[182] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 85.
[183] Ibid, 85.
[184] Ely S. Parker. *Letter to Ulysses S. Grant*. June 29, 1871. American Philosophical Society, *Ely Samuel Parker Papers 1794-1946.*

Chapter 9: Tears Make a Bitter Throat[185]

Parker was both deeply depressed and increasingly disillusioned with Washington. Now out of work, he began investing in the stock market with the money he had. An early investment in a carpet company paid dividends, and Ely and Minnie Parker accumulated a small fortune.[186] With that money, they moved to Fairfield, Connecticut, where Minnie had family.[187] Fairfield was an affluent town, connected by rail to Wall Street in New York City. If there was a place for Parker to bounce back financially, it was here. It was in Fairfield in 1878 that Minnie would give birth to their only child, Maud Theresa Parker, or Ah-weh-ee-yo (Beautiful Flower in Seneca).[188]

Parker's time as an investor came to an abrupt end in September 1873, when the so-called "Panic of 1873" caused the stock market to crash, brought on by the collapse of the financial firm of Jay Cooke & Company.[189] The Parkers' fortunes plummeted, but Ely resolved to get a job and provide for his family. They kept their home in Fairfield, but moved to a home on West 42nd Street in the city as their primary residence.[190] Parker's first instinct was to use his credentials to find an engineering job, but he soon found that his skills, so renowned in the 1850s, were now out of date. He spent some time working for the municipal government as a prison architect, but, once completed, that job did not lead to anything more.[191]

A friend of Parker's, now on the Board of Commissioners of the New York City Police Department (NYPD), was able to get him a job. Parker joined the NYPD as a clerk on September

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[185] The title for this chapter comes from an Iroquois saying related by Arthur C. Parker: "Spend no time in mourning the failures of the past. Tears make a bitter throat. Look ahead, there is more work to do. Unstop your ears and listen. Hear the call."
[186] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois,"* 85.
[187] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 47:14.
[188] Ibid, 47:33.
[189] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois,"* 85.
[190] Ibid, 85.
[191] Parker and Hollcroft, "Ely S. Parker – Man and Mason.", 245.

30, 1876.[192] Thus he began his work at the position that he would hold until the end of his life. Parker filled out orders for brooms, picks, and shovels and did other menial tasks befitting a desk clerk in the Department of Repairs and Supplies at NYPD headquarters at 300 Mulberry Street. Sometimes his work took on a slightly more exciting character and drifted into the public eye, such as once in 1885 when Parker got to co-lead an investigation team to survey Thomas Edison's company's method for laying underground electrical wires, eventually coming to the conclusion that these wires were unsound and impractical.[193] Such work would have reminded Parker of his old engineering days, but it was a rare diversion. Parker would stay in his office until the day he died, working long hours with little authority, recognition, or possibility for advancement.[194] It was a thankless job, but to say it was a lonely one would be incorrect.

Parker's funds had dwindled, but his fame had not. Many who were interested in seeing the Grand Sachem and Grant's former aide visited his office at 300 Mulberry. Among his more distinguished guests included the aforementioned Jacob Riis and a young Theodore Roosevelt.[195] However, it was one meeting with a then-unknown woman that would make the biggest impact on Parker during this period of his life.

Harriet Maxwell Converse was a New York woman of Scottish descent who met Parker in 1881. Their meeting created in Converse a passion for Iroquois history and culture, and over time she grew very close to the entire Parker family. She learned the Senecas' stories and collected hundreds of artifacts, which she displayed at her home. In 1884, Caroline Parker Mountpleasant, Ely's sister, sponsored Converse's adoption into the Senecas as a member of the Snipe Clan.[196] In Arthur C. Parker's 1919 biography, a total of eighteen letters from Donehogawa

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[192] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 85.
[193] "INVESTIGATING UNDERGROUND WIRES." *New York Times* (1857-1922), May 30, 1885.
[194] Ibid, 86.
[195] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 221.
[196] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 102.

to Gayaneshaoh (Converse's Seneca name) are reprinted in full. In these letters, we see a very close personal relationship between one curious to learn everything she could about the Iroquois and another who was more than happy to tell her. It is hard to argue that this relationship did not give the aging and increasingly sedentary Parker a new lease on life and rekindle the passion he once had for educating others about his people and their culture. For the first time since his school days, we can see the flowery and descriptive language of which Ely Parker was a master come out on full display. Writing to Converse on the occasion of her upcoming birthday, Parker said on the subject,

> I sometimes envy people who are gifted with birthdays and who can proudly point to some day of the year that passes over them as the day of all days most consequential to them. For remember, I am nearly akin to Topsy who never had a birthday, never was born, and only growed up; my birthday which occurred sometime "in the course of human events" was never recorded in any book of man, hence I take the liberty of being neither elated nor depressed on any special day of the year and I know not whether I am old or young. I love all the days of the year alike, and can claim any one or all of them as my birthdays. Can any one be more blessed, and also more unfortunate? I am afraid if I knew the day I should always be dreading its return or live in fear of its never returning. But as it is I am in the most gifted state of "innocuous desuetude" and consequently always happy.[197]

Harriet Maxwell Converse has a complicated legacy, explored in depth by John C. Winters in his seminal work *"The Amazing Iroquois" and the Invention of the Empire State*. She was, in his words, a "salvage ethnographer," someone who bought wholeheartedly into the idea that Native cultures were dying out as a result of the implacable current of history and that their

[197] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 172-173.

objects and stories needed preservation before they disappeared from the world entirely.[198] She oversaw the transfer of countless Iroquois cultural artifacts from the ownership of their original communities to state museums and private collections. Conversely, Converse was indisputably a staunch political ally of the Iroquois and one in whom their leadership had immense trust. She played a critical role in the fight against the 1887 Dawes Act which would have seen Native land rights severely weakened, tribal sovereignty all but crushed, and Native populations integrated and assimilated by force (though the act did pass, subsequent legal and political action ultimately mitigated its effects).[199] She was, like Ely Parker, a complex person, a defender of Indigenous rights who favored cultural assimilation. To those of us in the twenty-first century, these might be contradictory ideas, but to Parker and Converse, there was nothing inconsistent about them.

In 1884, Parker became heavily involved in the exhumation and reburial of the remains of Red Jacket, the famous Seneca chief and Parker's ancestor. This operation was not being undertaken by any Seneca organization, but by the Buffalo Historical Society and its former president, William Cullen Bryant. Parker was skeptical, primarily about the validity of the remains, and wrote a letter to Bryant questioning him on this point. Additionally, he indirectly expressed his skepticism, while strategically not leveling any direct criticism at Bryant.

> Whatever views I may have entertained respecting this scheme, which is not new, is now of no consequence, for your letter advices me that the subject has been fully discussed with the survivors with the families of the departed chiefs, and also of the council of the Seneca Nation, who have all assented to the project of reinterment and the site selected.[200]

What Parker was saying to Bryant was that if he was going to pursue this, he had better have his bases covered. Parker was satisfied with Bryant's assurance, but cautiously so. In his

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[198] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 101-103.
[199] Ibid, 103.
[200] "RED JACKET'S BONES." *New York Times* (1857-1922), July 1, 1884.

response to Parker, Bryant elaborated on the circumstances in which the old chief's remains were recovered. He claimed that some individual Iroquois and white citizens of Buffalo had taken it upon themselves to remove the remains due to the dilapidated nature of the gravesite and the fact of its being owned by the Ogden Land Company. Bryant said their actions were wrong, but that their intentions were good. Sometime after they had been exhumed, the remains had been held at the house of Ruth Stevenson, Red Jacket's stepdaughter, until the time they were to be reinterred at the original site. Bryant claims that the remains had always been accounted for, and that it was highly unlikely that they were inauthentic.[201]

"Highly unlikely" would still not be enough. Parker traveled upstate and reviewed the remains himself (what methods he used are not known, however) until he was satisfied that they were indeed the genuine article. Once he had confirmed that everything was done properly, he began to work with Bryant on the preparation for the occasion, becoming the event planner and master of ceremonies.[202]

On the day of the event, Parker appeared in the halls of the Buffalo Historical Society, wearing his brigadier general's uniform, and gave a speech. In the audience was a large crowd made up from every band of every nation of the Six Nations, who had come from as far afield as Brantford, Canada, for the occasion, as well as a significant number of white observers. After giving thanks to the Great Spirit, Parker gave his speech.

> These are the remains of our own people, our chiefs. We are to bury them in the graveyard of the white man, on ground that was once our own. We are here by the kindness of these white brothers. We must do as they direct and observe decorum. When we buried a chief in the past we took the horns from his head and laid them away. We were sad and let our feelings be known. Let us feel now that we are

[201] "RED JACKET'S BONES."
[202] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 86-87.

> again burying our own dead, the chiefs who were once our pride and strength. You are thinking men; think when you go back to your lodging places of the words you have heard; think of the wishes of our white friends and obey them.[203]

If Parker's words about obeying the white man's wishes and doing as they direct sound obsequious and slavish to a twenty-first-century reader, one should not fail to consider the way in which he speaks of Iroquois tradition. Contradicting the prevailing views of assimilation, where Indigenous culture and tradition are dying out to make way for those of Anglo-America, Parker is putting forward his ideal of assimilation. The world is changing, and sooner or later the Iroquois will have to change along with it. But he is recalling and invoking Iroquois practices, reviving them in a new way to persist in a new era. Parker never saw assimilation (at least his brand of it) and the continuity of traditional practices to be mutually exclusive.

Ely's brother Nicholson H. Parker delivered a translated version to the crowd in Seneca, which was apparently very well received. The bones of Red Jacket and several other Iroquois chiefs were then taken in a large and extravagant procession to Forest Lawn Cemetery. Other Iroquois chiefs gave speeches and said prayers; Bryant had his chance to give a speech, as did the elderly former mayor of Buffalo George W. Clinton.[204] Yet even as powerful a display of extant Iroquois tradition as this was, many white observers were still determined to see only what they wanted to see. One white commentator called the ceremony "the last public manifestation of the dignity and nobleness of the Senecas."[205]

Following the reinterment ceremony, the Buffalo Historical Society announced its intention to raise a monument to Red Jacket on the site of his burial. Harriet Maxwell Converse set about trying to raise funds, while Parker began work on a design for the statue. The design he

[203] "HONORING DEAD INDIAN CHIEFS." *New York Times* (1857-1922), October 10, 1884.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois,"* 87.

came up with was a twenty-six-foot-tall dying tree rooted to a large boulder at the base of the statue. The base would display bronze tablets each representing a clan totem, as well as scenes from Red Jacket's life. The imagery of the monument was grounded in symbolism.

> The dying tree, which one newspaper interpreted as a "remembrance" of Red Jacket's apocryphal last words in which he compared himself to a "blasted hemlock," could also be a representation of the Great Tree of Peace, the international law created by Deganawida long ago that bound the Six Nations Confederacy together in peace. The boulder, an allegory evoking George Washington's promise to the Senecas in 1792 of a peace "founded on the principles of justice and humanity upon the immovable rock," was supported by "four bronze turtles" that represented "the Indian belief that the earth is a great place supported by turtles."[206]

Parker's design would put his ancestor at home within traditional symbology and mythos of the Iroquois, invoking the world Red Jacket inhabited and the actual events of his life. The monument would set in stone the Indigeneity that many were determined to believe was vanishing in the world, and would symbolize Red Jacket and the people he sought to defend in a way that all could see.

The Buffalo Historical Society hated it. They snubbed Parker's "horrid," "grotesque," and "unorthodox" design for a more recognizable, conventional statue in the classical Greco-Roman style.[207] This would allow the BHS to take Red Jacket out of the realm of the Iroquois and place him in the pantheon of American heroes. It served to simultaneously "claim" Red Jacket for the Anglo-American view of history while also leaning into the trope of the

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[206] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois,"* 88.
[207] Ibid, 89.

"vanishing Indian" complete with a quote at the base about the Seneca people "...soon to be vanished and forgotten."[208]

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The BHS-approved final design for the Red Jacket monument, where it stands to this day and, since 1897, has been joined by his descendant, Ely Parker.

Back in New York City, Parker was helping his friend Converse with another venture. Converse had set to work turning her townhouse at West 20th Street into a veritable Iroquois museum, decked from floor to ceiling with her many Iroquois artifacts. The "Indian Colony," as it came to be known, served a dual purpose. One was to provide a venue to entertain prominent anthropologists and tourists, and a meeting space for her to help such guests plan out their visits

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[208] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 89.
[209] "The Graves of Red Jacket," WNY Heritage.

into Iroquois country. However, it was also a space for Native Americans themselves. Natives in the city on business or leisure had a place where they could go to relax, and Converse provided them with whatever supplies or assistance they needed.[210] This Colony proved popular with both kinds of visitors, and Ely Parker was heavily involved in its upkeep.[211]

Parker was also involved in another type of historical memorialization. This was the era of Civil War commemoration: statue dedications, veterans' reunions, banquets, and public speeches occurred with frequency and fanfare. Parker himself was tied to New York and to the Union Army, and he took part in the memorial efforts of both, becoming a member of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR).[212] Memorial Day, 1885, saw Parker attend an event at the Academy of Music in Manhattan, joining distinguished guests such as President Grover Cleveland and General Winfield Scott Hancock as well as a large number of Union Army veterans. In addition to commemorating the Union cause, they paid tribute to Ulysses S. Grant himself, who was very ill at the time.[213] Grant passed away two months later.

Parker got to utilize his public speaking skills during this period. The *New York Times* mentions his participation in 1887's Decoration Day, a large and elaborate city-wide ceremony of parades, reviews, assemblies, and speeches, surrounding the main event: the decoration of over 4,000 graves belonging to Union war dead by the various GAR posts present in the city. On Hart Island, Parker gave a speech to the assembled members of two of these GAR posts, though the content of the speech is not known.[214]

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[210] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 113-114.
[211] Ibid, 91.
[212] Ibid, 93.
[213] "RIGHTS OF THE VETERANS." *New York Times* (1857-1922), May 31, 1885.
[214] "DECORATION DAY EXERCISES" *New York Times* (1857-1922), May 28, 1887.

ELY S. PARKER AS BRIGADIER-GENERAL [215]

This image of an elderly Parker shows him in his Brigadier General's uniform, and is probably similar to how he would have appeared at the Red Jacket reinterment ceremony or the numerous Civil War commemoration events. One of his three medals is from the Grand Army of the Republic.

Occasionally, Parker's war service and his Indigeneity intersected. On September 23, 1891, the 63-year-old Parker joined a delegation of four hundred men sent to dedicate a monument to the 42nd New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment.[216] The 42nd was known as the "Tammany" regiment, named for the infamous Democratic Party political machine Tammany Hall, having been organized by its members during the war. Beyond its simple association with the political organization, the 42nd identified with its namesake more deeply. Tammany, or Tamanend, was a famous Delaware or Lenni-Lenape chief long celebrated for his efforts to secure peace with the English colonists in the seventeenth century.[217] Like Red Jacket, he had been "claimed" by Anglo-American mythology as a figure central to the American story.

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[215] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 163.
[216] "TAMMANY AT GETTYSBURG." *New York Times* (1857-1922), September 24, 1891.
[217] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 95.

Parker's presence at this event can be attributed to three reasons. First, his status as a Civil War veteran, in which capacity he was still well-known for his service to Grant and his key role at Appomattox. Second, he was working for the New York Police Department, an institution that had close ties to Tammany Hall and the Democratic Party since the early part of the century. Finally, he was recognizable as a Native American, a Seneca chief and the spiritual heir to the famous figures of the past century.

The morning after the Tammany veterans arrived at Gettysburg, during which time the four hundred of them overwhelmed the small town's meager number of hotels and had to be lodged in private homes, the ceremony took place.[218] Parker's long speech is recounted in full in Arthur C. Parker's biography. He splits his words rather evenly between straightforward commemoration of the Union war effort and of Chief Tammany himself and his legacy. On Gettysburg and its veterans, Parker referred to the battle as the Thermopylae of America, one in which patriotic soldiers stood and fought under the banner of "Union, Liberty and the Starry Flag forever," saving the republic from destruction and setting free four million people held in bondage, thus making "...a truth of the theory long since announced to the world, 'that all men are created equal.'"[219] Though, as Parker was quick to point out, Gettysburg alone did not win the war, as farther west the similarly decisive battle he had been involved in at Vicksburg was coming to a close, and there were two more years of fighting before the war could end.

Parker also tied Tammany into the larger American story. He described briefly the history of the Delawares, their dominion over the lands between the Hudson and Susquehanna Rivers, and how they "enjoyed liberty in its largest and most liberal sense. They loved their freedom and believed that when the Great Spirit made this country he made it free and placed his red children

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[218] "TAMMANY AT GETTYSBURG."
[219] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 184-185.

here to enjoy it."[220] Eventually, the Delawares were conquered by the much more "powerful and proud" Iroquois, and later the invasions of the white man led to "deadly hostilities…without cessation," and "wrongs, cruelties, injustice and many violations of faith," perpetrated on the Natives by the whites who clung to a gospel of "peace on earth and good will toward all men," but were not willing to extend such values to their Native neighbors.[221] The men of the 42nd had already taken on the symbology of Tammany, even going so far as to refer to themselves as "braves." As with Morgan's Grand Order of the Iroquois four decades earlier, Parker's role was to inject authenticity into these proceedings and remind the participants of the *real* history.

As Parker makes clear, Tammany and his legacy endures. The wise, strong, and peace-loving chief would become the "Patron-Saint of America," later invoked by the Patriot cause during the Revolution, the powerful political organization of New York City, and the regiment of volunteers during the last war.[222] With this speech, Parker was emphasizing the role that Native Americans had played in American history, not letting his audience forget just how important their stories were to the larger story of the country that these men had fought to save. Just what Parker made of the statue itself, which included a Delaware figure—like the Iroquois, famous for living in longhouses—standing in front of a teepee, is not known.

Parker continued appearing at public events, even as he reached the end of his life. On April 27, 1893, he took part in the annual banquet of the Ulysses S. Grant Association, which met to commemorate the life of the deceased general and president and raise money for a monument in his honor. The many distinguished guests included the Commanding General of the U.S. Army John M. Schofield (and the man who would soon take his place, General Nelson A. Miles), Mexican Ambassador Matías Romero, and Spanish Admiral the Duke of Veragua. Ely

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[220] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 182.
[221] Ibid, 183.
[222] Ibid, 182-183.

Parker was in attendance, and his wife Minnie observed in the spectators' gallery, the only recorded time she was in attendance at one of these events and one of Ely Parker's very last.[223]

[223] "IN MEMORY OF GEN. U.S. GRANT." *New York Times* (1857-1922), April 28, 1893.

Chapter 10: Folded in Death

Nicholson Henry Parker, Caroline "Carrie" Parker, and Levi Parker all died in a relatively short span during 1892 and 1893. According to Arthur C. Parker, the deaths of his beloved siblings deeply shocked and depressed Ely, and on June 15, 1893, he suffered an attack of paralysis while at his desk at 300 Mulberry Street.[224] Parker took some time off for his health, staying at his home in Fairfield, but returned to work as soon as he was physically able. His financial problems did not disappear with the worsening of his health, and so he was forced to sell many of his prized possessions. A March 13, 1894, article in the "Special Notices" section of the *New York Times* lists "...the remainder of Ely S. Parker's collection of Indian curios" for sale at the auction house on Fifth Avenue.[225] He at one point even considered pawning Red Jacket's peace medal, but decided against it.[226]

On the evening of August 31, 1895, Ely Samuel Parker was at the home of some of his friends, Arthur and Josephine Brown, in Fairfield, Connecticut. He said during the evening, "I came down to dinner to please the ladies, but I could not eat. I think I am dying physically." Parker then revealed "...his lower limbs, which were black with the lifeless blood that had settled there."[227] He was taken upstairs to the bedroom, where he was joined by his wife Minnie and his daughter Maud. Four hours later, he died.

Ely Parker's body, dressed in his Brigadier General's uniform, lay in an open casket for several days in the parlor of the Brown family home. In addition to Parker's wife and daughter, the mourners included Harriet Maxwell Converse, men from the Grand Army of the Republic, the Loyal Legion of the United States, the Society of Colonial Wars, local Episcopalian clergy,

[224] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 223.
[225] "Special Notices." *New York Times* (1857-1922), March 13, 1894.
[226] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 51:39.
[227] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 223.

and several Masonic brothers. Mourners left flowers, comrades-in-arms left medals, and clergy paid their respects. But it was Parker's Seneca visitors that drew the most attention. Six men and three women performed a ritual over Parker's body, the men forming an "honor guard" while the women placed and removed a series of wampum strings and belts. When this was completed, the three women deliberated amongst themselves who should succeed him as sachem, taking on the wampum beads and the name of Donehogawa.[228]

As the newspapers began to print the news of the death of the Grand Sachem well known as Grant's secretary, Colonel Frederick Dent Grant gave his thoughts. Grant, the general's eldest son, was serving as Police Commissioner of the NYPD. He said, and was quoted in the *New York Times* obituary,

> "Gen. Parker," he said, "was a brave man. He served on my father's staff during the war with distinction, and was promoted for bravery. The General has always retained the piece of paper on which the conditions of Lee's surrender at Appomattox were originally drawn." Col. Grant said he was thinking of Gen. Parker on the way to the city yesterday morning. "I am superstitious," he said, "and when I heard of his death, I was not surprised."[229]

Parker was initially laid to rest at a cemetery in Fairfield. But the Seneca leadership and Parker's Seneca family were not happy with this arrangement. For their Grand Sachem, a burial in the land of the Pequots would not do.[230] With the help of the Buffalo Historical Society, they reached out to the widowed Minnie Parker. With her permission, his remains were exhumed, and the General's body was taken by her and Converse to Buffalo. On January 20, 1897, the Grand Sachem Donehogawa was laid to rest in the same burial plot as his ancestor Red Jacket in Forest

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[228] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 96-97.
[229] "GEN. ELY S. PARKER DEAD."
[230] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 225.

Lawn Cemetery in Buffalo. His casket was draped with an American flag and strings of wampum, though these were removed before burial to be given to his successor.[231]

Parker's funeral was a symbol of his life in microcosm. Leadership, patriotism, service, hard work, the prestige and responsibility of rank and title, to both the United States of America and the Seneca nation. The flag and the wampum belt were together. It was a collision of worlds, certainly, but not a paradoxical one, not to Ely Parker.

[231] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 97.

Chapter 11: Gawasowaneh

Looming large over the story of Ely S. Parker is, of course, his great-nephew Arthur Caswell Parker. Historian, archaeologist, ethnologist, anthropologist, and—a term he created for himself—museologist, Arthur Parker was born in 1881 at Cattaraugus, New York, the son of Frederick Ely Parker (himself the son of Nicholson Henry Parker, Ely's brother) and Geneva Hortense Griswold, a white woman.[232] While in school, he took many trips to Harriet Maxwell Converse's "Indian Colony" in New York City, to the American Museum of Natural History, and to the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, leading Parker to take a serious interest in archaeology. After a brief spell doing field work, Parker, under the tutelage of his mentors Frederic Ward Putnam and Franz Boas, studied at Columbia University for a while but decided not to go on to a doctorate and instead center his career around museum work.[233]

It is important to note that in the Senecas' matrilineal society, Parker was not a Seneca by birthright, his mother having been a white woman. During a dig at Cattaraugus in 1903, Parker was adopted into the Bear Clan and given the name Gawasowaneh (Big Snowsnake).[234]

From there, Parker worked at the New York State Library and the New York State Museum. He co-founded the Society of American Indians (SAI) in 1911 alongside Dakota Sioux physician Charles Eastman, with the SAI's stated mission to "uplift" Native Americans through education, teach the general public about Natives, and help tribes negotiate with the government for their own self-determination. From 1920 to 1924, he served as Director of the Rochester Municipal Museum, and afterwards worked in local government and in other scholarly capacities for the increased welfare of the Iroquois people and the education of the wider public about their

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[232] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 135-137.
[233] Ibid, 138-139.
[234] Ibid, 139.

history, traditions, and place in the larger American story. His career spanned the turn of the century and the Progressive Era, to World War I and the Great Depression, to the New Deal and World War II, and finally into the opening years of the Cold War.

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One of the surprisingly few pictures of Arthur C. Parker available to us, this portrait shows the historian most likely around or slightly before 1919, around the age of 38, when he would have written his biography of Ely.

There was a larger overarching purpose to Arthur C. Parker's work. Every word he wrote and every artifact he displayed was meant to serve a coherent narrative. John C. Winters explains in great detail what Parker's telling of Iroquois history actually means. Parker broke down the stereotypes of the Wild West Show-era that held a chokehold over the average American's perception of Natives, and replaced it with an image of something truly great: the Iroquois

[235] Arthur Caswell Parker, *American Indian Freemasonry* (Buffalo Consistory, 1919), 2.

empire. Parker told New Yorkers, Americans, and the world of a powerful coalition in early America with a complex and sophisticated political system. The Iroquois carried out sweeping conquests while maintaining a strong religion, culture, and language, settling internal differences through reason and negotiation instead of violence.

Crucially, however, this view of the grand Iroquois empire was not mutually exclusive to the new United States of America. On the contrary, Parker argued, the two fit neatly into one another. The Six Nations were a veritable proto-United States, complete with a democratic form of government. In fact, Parker highlighted how much modern Americans could learn from the Iroquois, regarding women's rights and other progressive issues of the day.[236] He reinterpreted the history of the Iroquois as staunch allies of the early English colonists against the French and their Native allies, and much later as allies of the newly-formed Americans in their fight against the British in 1812.[237] Here was not savagery, Parker told the people of New York, but true civilization. Not in a mythical, ancient past, but in a recognizable present. If Parker's many exhibits, dioramas, or writings sparked interest, New Yorkers only needed to look to the western parts of their state where they could see the Senecas, Onondagas, Oneidas, Tuscaroras, Mohawks, and Cayugas, still existing in defiance of those who would believe they had gone extinct. Winters terms this "Iroquois exceptionalism."

Central to Arthur Parker's narrative of Iroquois greatness are its storied figures. Red Jacket was an obvious candidate, and one about whom Parker spent a considerable amount of time writing. But Red Jacket could be all too easily confined to the past on his own; the BHS's aforementioned statue and its quote at the base were proof of that. He needed a successor, and this is where the Grand Sachem Donehogawa, Brigadier General Ely S. Parker, comes in.

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[236] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois,"* 148.
[237] Ibid, 149-150.

Arthur Parker, in one of the final chapters of his biography, details the time he spent with his great-uncle during his childhood. Evident to the reader is the warmth, affection, and admiration with which the young Arthur viewed his "Uncle Ely," whose portrait in full dress uniform adorned the mantlepiece in the living room of his grandfather Nicholson's farmhouse.[238]

> To this home of his brother, filled with sons and grand-children, would come our great Uncle Ely. Usually when he came he would bring a suit of clothes for my grand-father, made in exact pattern of his own; and a big satchel of presents for everyone else. I must have been seven years old when I first saw Uncle Ely. I did not know he had come, and rushing into the sitting room, I called out "Gramp!" Then I fell back in dismay, for there were two "Gramps," dressed alike and to my startled eyes, each an exact counterpart, but when they spoke I noticed that their voices were slightly different. While our distinguished uncle was there, all the Indians of note would come to greet him. Then there would be a time of story-telling and reminiscences, that grandfather would relate to me when all the guests had departed, or when later we would drive together with Flora or Nell, the faithful old mares.[239]

To the seven-year-old Arthur Parker, Ely must have seemed a legend. This reverence would have only increased as the young boy grew up and began to learn everything his great-uncle had accomplished. It was during Parker's early ethnological career and his time in the Society of American Indians when he wrote the biography. Ely S. Parker, to him, was a towering figure who proved that the traditional Iroquois values of service and patriotism were alive and well during the last century. It was just after World War I when the book was published, a period during which Parker had served on the New York State Draft Commission, invoking patriotism to inspire his fellow Iroquois to register for the draft.[240] Uncle Ely's service in the

[238] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 193.
[239] Ibid, 196.
[240] Ibid, 158-159.

Civil War, a war increasingly seen in the popular culture of the age as a “white man’s war,” was a perfect means through which to continue to explore the legacy of Iroquois patriotism.

Here is the issue with Ely S. and Arthur C. Parker. Almost everything we know about the former is filtered through the perspective of the latter. It was mentioned in the introduction of this work that Arthur Parker’s biography is an impossible to replicate source of information, and so it is. Being a member of the Parker family, related to the people who took part in the events recounted in the book, Arthur Parker was privy to a wealth of oral and written information that is now either nowhere to be found or taken by its keepers to the grave. This is not to say that the book is all hearsay. Parker is very careful to cite letters, newspapers, and official documents whenever possible, and the broad strokes of Ely Parker’s life map onto what we know. But the great amount of detail that Arthur Parker provides is relatively impossible to conclusively prove or disprove. Not only did Arthur Parker write the first-ever biography of his great-uncle, he is the one responsible for tracking down and collecting all 3.5 linear feet of correspondence related to Ely Parker, and donating it all to the American Philosophical Society as the *Ely Samuel Parker Papers* collection in 1950, thirty-one years after the publication of the biography.

Arthur Parker was, himself, a living primary source when it came to the story of Ely S. Parker. He was an accredited historian with few equals in his area of expertise at the time he was writing, one deeply concerned with truth and authenticity, yet one with an agenda and an obvious personal stake in the subject being depicted. This does not mean that his work should be thrown out (were we to do that, this paper would hardly be a third of its present size), but taken with a grain of salt and interrogated wherever necessary.

One example of this is the brief exchange that has come to be synonymous with the life and legacy of Ely S. Parker: the “we are all Americans” quote delivered by Parker to Lee at

Appomattox. It is not sourced from any written document in Arthur Parker's biography, and it is not found to be mentioned anywhere before 1919. John C. Winters thus comes to the conclusion that the exchange was most likely fake, an invention of Arthur Parker as somewhat of a response to the famous (and likely misinterpreted) story from Horace Porter's 1888 memoir that implies that Lee believed Parker to be black.[241] The author of this work would not go quite that far. Arthur Parker, though not sourcing his great uncle's famous exchange from any written document, does go to some lengths to prove its validity. He claims to have heard it from two independent sources: Harriet Maxwell Converse and James F. Kelly (a sculptor who became good friends with Parker in his later life), who both remembered Ely Parker telling them while he was still alive. Furthermore, Kelly "...copied many of his interviews with General Parker immediately after they happened," according to Arthur Parker.[242] Is this solid, incontrovertible evidence? Of course not. But unless we are willing to call Arthur Parker a liar, we should cautiously entertain the possibility that the exchange, or a form of it, did indeed happen.

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[241] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois,"* 60-61.
[242] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 134.

Conclusion

On November 24, 1999, the Public Broadcasting Service aired a documentary film titled "Warrior in Two Worlds." The documentary, which runs just under one hour, is narrated by veteran Cherokee actor Wes Studi and purports to tell the story of the engineer, chief, and general who struggled in "two worlds." The narration begins with a central question, a conflict of Parker's legacy over which it claims there is continual debate. "Was he a hero, or a traitor?" asks Studi, rhetorically. Several historians come on screen and explain Parker's apparently troubled legacy: one in which a young and naive Seneca was slowly drawn into a foreign, predatory world that demanded he abandon his sense of self and cut himself off from his roots. These historians, including Rick W. Hill, Tuscarora of the Beaver Clan, John Mohawk, Seneca of the Turtle Clan, and Dr. Robert W. Venables, are relatively unified in their message: Parker lies somewhere in the vague middle ground between a victim and a sellout. He is imagined as a sort of cautionary tale for young Native intellectuals, to not fly too close to the sun and burn your wings. The content is well-researched, fascinating, and insightful, the average person will glean good and important information from the film, and it has been used several times as a source for this work. However, it is the conclusions that require deeper analysis.

First, let us define cultural assimilation, a topic so central to Parker's life and his legacy. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines assimilation in a sociological context as "the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society."[243] Native Americans certainly have a different cultural and ethnic heritage from the Anglo-American sphere that did indeed dominate nineteenth-century America, and men like

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[243] Elizabeth Prine Pauls, "Assimilation | Definition, History, & Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998, https://www.britannica.com/topic/assimilation-society.

Parker would have wanted to see Natives participate in politics and society by becoming compatible with the culture that held sway over those. But not all assimilation is created equal. We have heard Winters differentiate between those who wanted the assimilation of the Natives to ensure their docility for the purposes of economic exploitation and those who saw the strength inherent to a type of assimilation. To say that Ely and Arthur Parker were assimilationists is correct. To believe that they wanted Native Americans to lose their autonomy and shed their history and culture is patently false. Even as they cut their hair short, wore suits, spoke in English, and participated in American institutions, they did so with one eye on their cultural background, and in Ely Parker's case, their traditional obligations.

Was Parker the proud, egotistical man who abrogated his duties as sachem, who knowingly abandoned the Seneca world for the white world, causing suffering and in turn suffering himself because of his momentous choice? The evidence does not seem to suggest this. It should be reiterated that the previously listed historians and experts of the documentary, who are all accredited and knowledgeable, are making a conclusion that has to do more with opinion than historical fact, and is thus not something easily proven or disproven. That said, they are making their claims based on several identifiable factors in Ely Parker's life. These can be interrogated, first by considering the factual evidence and secondly by examining the very deliberate framing that the experts chose to view Parker's life through.

First, the issue of the "two worlds." There is no question that Parker was assimilated and that he believed in assimilation for Native Americans, but how assimilated is too assimilated? Did Ely Parker forget that he was a Seneca? Towards the end of his life, when Parker was consumed with the monotony of hourly wage work at the police station, he did indicate that he had been considering his cultural background less and less. He said to Converse at one point

once their correspondence got going "that had it not been for her sympathetic interest in him and his people he should almost have forgotten his ancestry."[244] However, this seems to indicate less of a dramatic shift in ways of living that made him feel "white" and more an indication that the hour-by-hour grind of work as a desk clerk was taking its toll on him, as anyone who has worked a nine-to-five job can tell the reader.

Beyond this one line there is nothing to suggest that Parker "abandoned" the Seneca side of himself. It is hard to believe that he would have grown entirely comfortable as a man like any other in the white man's world simply because no matter where he went, no one would let him forget who he was. Even in the friendliest company he was persistently asked (sometimes informed, often ignorant) questions about Native peoples or the "Indian problem," and this does not even cover the hostility, spite, and racism he never failed to engender in the worst company. He could not change the color of his skin, but did he try to change everything else? Not exactly. From the meetings of the Grand Order of the Iroquois to the burial ceremony of Red Jacket, Parker frequently either spoke Seneca or had someone present to translate his words into that language. Arthur Parker, who himself had assimilationist leanings, has this to say about both Ely and his brother Nicholson: "he never could completely accept civilization's teachings or wholly neglect the philosophy of his fathers. Seeing true virtue in each, according to his mood he argued for each."[245] Parker's continual appearance wearing Red Jacket's peace medal, even bringing it with him on campaign in the Civil War, shows how proud he was to display that aspect of himself.

Did Ely Parker, then, abandon his duties as Grand Sachem to selfishly pursue his own career away from his ancestral homeland? There is even more evidence to contradict this. First,

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[244] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 163.
[245] Ibid, 198.

let us begin with Parker's appointment as sachem following the death of Chief Blacksmith in 1851 (or 1852, sources differ). Parker had, by that time, already spent several years working in Rochester as an engineer. The Clan Matrons would have known this. They would also likely have known that he was not in a position to quit his work as he was perennially in debt and that Nicholson and Caroline Parker, attending school at Albany, relied on his semi-regular payments to cover their extra expenses. If they required a sachem to stay at Tonawanda, they could have chosen someone else. Next, we address his going away to fight in the Civil War, the "white man's war." He evidently respected his obligations enough to ask the Clan Matrons permission before he did anything else, second only to gaining permission from his father. It is true that there were a few who disagreed with his decision, and considered asking Parker to relinquish his title if he was intent on going to war.[246] However, the fact remains that the Clan Matrons did indeed grant permission, and threw him a banquet before performing a ceremony for his safe return.

After the war, what then? Why did he not go back home to Tonawanda, as did most of the three hundred Iroquois warriors who served in the Union Army? Simply put, he did not believe his work was finished. It was as much his genuine desire to see peace between whites and Natives as it was cynical career advancement that made him seek out the position of Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the first place.

> The entire system was corrupt, Indians not only were massacred upon the slightest provocation, but even when peaceful they were encroached upon and robbed. There was a powerfully entrenched machine back of this system of murder and robbery. Each thief had his lobbyist.[247]

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[246] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 100.
[247] Ibid, 144.

Parker had been incensed at this perpetual injustice, informed by his own experiences and those of his people, and had made it known to Grant and Lincoln in more than one late-night chat at City Point that he wanted to do something about it. He stayed in Washington D.C. because he thought he could effect meaningful change, and potentially even save other Native peoples the same kind of suffering the Senecas had endured.[248] Possibly the most complicated line in the documentary comes from Tuscarora historian Rick W. Hill, who has this to say about Parker's tenure with the OIA and his ultimate downfall:

> He knew [the Office of Indian Affairs] was a corrupt system going in. His pride and his ego said "I can change this." In reality, that corruption was so deep, it was so ingrained within the fabric of the institution and those that were running it, that you couldn't change it.[249]

Anyone who has even cursory knowledge of the horrific abuses of the Office of Indian Affairs and its predecessors and successors can sympathize with Hill's negative assessment of the institution. But it is too easy to simply blame the nebulous concept of "the system" or to suggest that Ely Parker was only a victim, because that necessarily reinforces a non-Native viewpoint about tragic endings as well as making Parker's downfall seem inevitable. The reality is more complicated than Hill's brief assessment. Parker, even considering his missteps such as his response to the Marias massacre, had actually made inroads in securing peace. He was entirely correct that it was monetary interests that were the biggest obstacle towards peace with the nations in the west, and had made real progress, if only tentative steps. His downfall was the result of a man with a grudge. To imply that the system was always going to push him out is to

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[248] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 154.
[249] Young and Spurling, *Warrior in Two Worlds*, 44:49.

both traffic in the concept of inevitability (which should be anathema to any historian) and discount Parker's very real achievements.

Any infrequency on Parker's part to continue to visit Tonawanda—though Arthur Parker maintains that even in old age he returned every year at least once or twice—can be partially explained by the relative poverty of his family after the Panic of 1873.[250] When one has a wife and daughter to think about, it may be that putting food on the table becomes the foremost priority. Additionally, Parker did truly love his wife, despite the subtle implication in the documentary that there may have been a romantic element to his relationship with Converse. Parker called Minnie "the one woman in all the world for me," and looked after her during her frequent illnesses.[251] She took center stage in his priorities, and he would spend the rest of his life trying to provide for her the kind of life that she had become accustomed to living.

Finally, we return to the question of assimilation. That Parker believed in some form of assimilation as a means of resolving the questions of the day is indisputable. Yet even as we may criticize Parker's methods from the benefit of hindsight, words like "traitor," "victim," or "sellout" are not particularly useful, which are all used by the historians to label Parker. They do so indirectly, in the manner of stating "some have stated…" but it is clear from the conclusions they draw that they believe these words to have some credence. The idea that Parker chose the "white world" over the "Seneca world" is a modern one, and setting such a defined boundary is unhelpful, as historians are always supposed to approach these subjects with the nuance and complexity they require. Parker's battle, as he most likely would have seen it, was not between assimilation and authenticity, but between assimilation and extermination. To imply that Parker left behind one world to join another is an unhelpful and flawed mode of analysis for multiple

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[250] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 193.
[251] Ibid, 221.

reasons. First, it superimposes a false dichotomy between the "authentically Seneca" world and the world of the white man that was simply never there for Parker to begin with. He was born a Seneca on Seneca lands to Seneca parents, and raised with the language and stories of his ancestors, but he was also the son of the top-hat-wearing, buckboard-driving, Baptist minister William Parker. From his early days he felt the influences of both cultures melding together, and he spent the rest of his life trying to reconcile the best aspects of both.

Nor was Parker's simultaneous desire to defend his people's welfare and to be accepted in white society as much of a "paradox" as some have made it out to be. Former Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs Kevin Gover, in his 2000 dedication of the Bureau of Indian Affairs's Ely S. Parker Building, put forward the idea that Parker's defense of Indigenous sovereignty and his simultaneous belief in Native assimilation was "paradoxical".[252] John C. Winters responds to this notion succinctly. To Parker, these ideas would not be inconsistent at all. As Winters sums it up:

> There is no question that people like Parker often regurgitated what white audiences wanted to hear, often for their own benefit, but a more careful analysis of Parker's life reveals a far more complex history. He was indeed assimilated, in fact he took steps to ensure that happened, but by speaking on the colonizer's terms in their own language, he was also able to shape public opinion about the Iroquois in surprisingly sensitive ways, even if that was not always his intention. These moments made Haudenosaunee culture and history more palatable to an otherwise dismissive white culture that sought Indigenous erasure and, at times, cultural cooptation.[253]

The attitude towards Parker by the historians who appear in the documentary (though, to their credit, they are willing to admit that the truth is more complicated) reveals a sort of

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[252] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 98-99.
[253] Ibid, 99-100.

lingering resentment of Parker for having left in the first place. How new is this attitude? Even if, as Winters points out, Parker's persistent attempts to get his foot in the door in white high society was unpopular among his fellow Senecas (Arthur Parker makes a similar concession, though tempers it by implying that dissent was only voiced by a handful of short-sighted naysayers), it ignores something that Parker would have considered paramount: his own family.[254] In all of Parker's long correspondence with his brothers and sisters (he was especially close to Nicholson and Caroline), there is no evidence that they ever gave Parker anything less than their familial support for his choice of career path. Ely, Nicholson, and Caroline Parker remained close for the rest of their lives, as can be seen vividly in Arthur Parker's account of the two brothers' regular reunions. It may be true that Nicholson and Caroline were more important "in protecting the Senecas' sovereignty long-term and in resisting the encroachment of predatory missionaries, their schools, and land speculators," while Parker went off to Washington and then New York City, but it should not be forgotten that by that point Parker had given fifteen years of his life to the defense of Tonawanda, and his role in their 1857 victory over the Ogden Company should not be understated.[255]

The less dramatic but more simple understanding is that Nicholson and Ely, for example, simply pursued different paths in life because of who they were. While Ely Parker was a man of government, business, academia, and military service, Nicholson, the official U.S. interpreter, had his interests closer to home. He was a farmer and held a passion for farming, becoming a prominent member of the Iroquois Agricultural Society, and served at various times as a clerk, marshal, and census agent for the Tonawanda Senecas.[256] He maintained his homestead at Tonawanda until his death. If Ely Parker was a traitor, for the reasons alluded to above, then

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[254] Winters, *"The Amazing Iroquois"*, 61-62.
[255] Ibid, 62.
[256] Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker*, 198.

Nicholson Parker could be termed a model citizen of the Senecas for the fact of his never leaving his home and farm. And yet, the two brothers' friendship never wavered.

We need to understand the people of the past for who they were, to understand where they came from, and just what they wanted to accomplish. It is also important never to deprive our historical actors of agency, lest they be reduced to non-entities projected upon by those seeking to answer the political and societal questions of the day instead of being considered for who they were. Ely S. Parker did many things in his life, but an important component of his character was that he made deliberate choices for concrete reasons. If he made missteps or had regrets at the end of his life, as many people do, he never once tried to divest himself of responsibility. If Parker lived to hear what people were saying about him in the twenty-first century, there is no telling how he would react, though we may guess at it in our quest to understand the man as he saw himself. Parker always had critics and opponents, as does any person with ambition, ideas, and a desire for change. Traitor or sellout, he may have heard versions of those accusations before. But there is no way he would ever have let himself be called a victim.

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