

## Introduction

As Jim Miller's work on Oka and the land claims process indicates (see the Articles section in this issue), the dispute over title to lands occupied by the Mohawks near the Quebec town of Oka has a long history. Within that context, the following documents focus on a petition decrying the measures taken by Mohawks to protest what they apparently regarded as the violation of their land rights. The petition and related information (translated from French) speak to the protracted nature of the dispute, as well as to the social gulf that by the mid-1870s separated the Mohawks and towns people.

The petition, dated June 1875, was endorsed by some 110 Oka residents, including the mayor and town councillors, and was addressed to the Governor General of Canada. In turn, it was forwarded to the Ministry of the Interior, which at the time was responsible for Indian Affairs. The office of Under Secretary of State responded by reassuring religious and civil officials in Oka that the matter would be investigated and then seemingly by consulting legal opinions on whether or not the federal government had jurisdiction over the matter. Finally, a full year later, Under Secretary of State E.J. Langevin informed the minister of the interior about the petition and the disposition of the jurisdictional issue involved.

Taken together, the documents are prophetic of the conflict and jurisdictional confusion that would come to pass at Kanesatake in 1990.

F. Laurie Barron



## Document One:

### Lake of Two Mountains Petition

To His Excellency [the Governor General]

The humble Petition of the undersigned, proprietors and inhabitants of the Municipality of the Lake of Two Mountains and vicinity Respectfully represents:

1st That a faction of Indian Rebels of this locality seriously disturbs the Public peace; and considerably depreciates the value of property.

2nd That they throw down fences and open gates.

3rd That they set fire to the woods.

4th That they tear up the boundary marks of properties; and shade trees planted in the Village.

5th That recently they have overturned chopped and burned the fences of many proprietors.

6th That their audacity continuing to increase, they threaten to kill—to demolish and burn houses. They march thro. the Village in armed troupes, and resist the Public force.

7th That the Chiefs are the advisers and instigators—the leaders of this faction of evil doers.

8th That recourse to the Tribunals, and the condemnation they have always undergone there, without stopping their depredations, has proved a source of ruin to us, from the expense it occasions, and the costs which we often have to pay — the defendants being too poor.

9th That discouragement and fear has [*sic*] spread through the whole population: that buildings in course of erection or projected, are all stayed.

For these reasons, we ask that all the Indians of this locality be disarmed: that their Chiefs be broken; and that there be no others but the officers of the Municipality that the Government take all further measures necessary to establish peace.

And your Petitioners etc.

(signed)

Source: PAC, Indian Affairs Red Series, RG 10, Vol. 1961, File 4937, 1875; Finder: Frank Tough.

## Document Two: Response by the Under Secretary of State

Ottawa 22nd June 1876

The Hon  
The Minister of the Interior  
Superintendent General of Indian Affairs

Sir,

I am directed to inform you that a Petition has been presented to His Excellency the Governor General from the Mayor, Councillors and Citizens of the Village of Oka, complaining of various acts of violence and lawlessness on the part of certain Indians of the Iroquois tribe of Oka, to repress which the tribunals are said to be powerless and praying for the aid of the Government to arrest these disorders. I am further to state that the Petitioners have been informed that as the administration of Justice and the preservation of the peace be entirely within the jurisdiction of the local authorities, and the constitution of the Courts of Civil jurisdiction rests with the local Legislature, no action can be taken upon the matter of their petition by the Dominion Government, and that any relief in the premises should be obtained by them from the Lieutenant Governor of Quebec.

I am to add that His Honor the Lieutenant Governor of Quebec has also been informed to the above effect.

I have the honor to be  
Sir

Your obedient servant  
E.J. Langevin  
Under Secretary of State

Source: PAC, Indian Affairs Red Series, RG 10, Vol. 1990, File 6625, 1876; Finder: Frank Tough.