“You are going to be the Abraham Lincoln of the Indians”

The Wisconsin Oneida, John Collier, and the Indian New Deal

S. T. Hilger
Senior History Thesis
Spring 2007
Dr. Oberly
Dedicated to the Memory of Provost Ronald Satz;
A man I aspire to emulate both academically and personally.
Table of Contents

Introduction .............................................................................................................................................. 3-6
From New York to Wisconsin .................................................................................................................. 6-12
The Age of Allotment ............................................................................................................................. 12-18
The “Roaring Twenties” and the Great Depression ................................................................................. 18-22
The Appointment of John Collier .......................................................................................................... 22-26
The Hayward Indian Congress ............................................................................................................... 26-32
The Creation of the Indian Reorganization Act and Indian New Deal .................................................. 32-37
Results on the Oneida Reservation ....................................................................................................... 37-45
World War II, the Demise of the Indian New Deal ............................................................................... 45-50
Final Remarks ........................................................................................................................................ 50-54
Sources Consulted ................................................................................................................................... 55-57
Appendix .................................................................................................................................................. 58-61
“In behalf of the Oneida Indians I will tell a little story which best tells how we felt toward the United States. A farmer went up to see the president of the last administration and the president asked him to lunch. The farmer accepted the invitation and went to lunch with the president. While they were eating the president stepped out and a little while later came back and saw the farmer’s plate empty. Another course was ordered and the president stepped out again. When he came back the plate was empty again. “My what an appetite you’ve got,” the president said, “I wish I had it.” When the farmer returned to his home he told about it. He said: “The president took everything we had. Took our stock, our land, our machinery, and now he wants my appetite!” Chief William Skenadore

Chief Skenadore’s joke delivered at the Hayward Indian Congress was meant to have the resounding effect of humor on the other delegates in attendance. Yet under the initial level of humor, the joke expressed an ominous truth which had cursed the Oneida Indians for over one-hundred years by 1934; interaction with the government of the United States. Through the signing of treaties and the heeding the government’s advice the Oneida Indians had watched their lifestyle dramatically shift; from a lifestyle of freely hunting and gathering on millions of acres of what became New York State, to being constrained to living on a reservation with little economic opportunity. Like the farmer in Chief Skenadore’s joke, the Wisconsin Oneidas had seen the United States take their land and traditional way of life, leaving them in a dire economic condition by the 1920s.

This paper tells the story of the relationship between the Oneida Indians of Wisconsin and an introverted archeologist from Atlanta, Georgia named John Collier.

The backdrop of this story takes place during the most difficult economic time of the

---

1 U.S. Department Of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Testimony of Chief William Skenadore At Hayward Wisconsin, April 24, 1934.
twentieth century in American History, the Great Depression. With the election of President Roosevelt, John Collier became the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The innovative Collier brought new ideas to reform the manner in which American Indians lived and interacted with the United States government. Collier’s idea later became known as the Indian Reorganization Act. The Indian Reorganization Act dramatically altered the life of the Wisconsin Oneidas, and signified a new era in relations between the United States government and the American Indian tribes.²

The Oneida Indian Tribe, along with the Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, Tuscarora, and Seneca comprise the Six Nations, commonly referred to as the Iroquois Confederation. The Six Nations of the Iroquois traditionally reside in the territories of the Northeast United States. While there has been substantive academic writing on the Iroquois of the Northeast United States, little academic coverage has been granted to the Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin. Like a superfluous little brother, the Oneida Indians of Wisconsin, geographically alienated from their tribal relatives have received little academic attention.

Historian Laurence Hauptman is the leading academic scholar on the Oneida Indians of Wisconsin. Hauptman has published numerous books and articles on the Iroquois and has included the Oneida Indians of Wisconsin within the auspices of his writings. In the *Iroquois and the New Deal*, Hauptman wrote a chapter on the effects of the WPA Writers Project on the Oneida Reservation. Hauptman has also collaborated

---

² The Indian Reorganization Act is often referred to under different names. The Indian Reorganization Act refers to legislation passed by Congress in 1934, different from the Indian New Deal which refers to the collective social welfare programs of the New Deal which benefited American Indians. The Indian Reorganization Act is also referred to as the Wheeler-Howard Bill, its official title in Congress.
with Historian Jack Campisi and Gordon McLester to edit two unique historic books. These books include personal accounts of Oneida Indians in addition to academic scholarship on the history of the Oneida Indians. Both *The Oneida Indian Experience: Two Perspectives*, and *The Oneida Indian Journey; From New York to Wisconsin; 1784-1860*, are valuable accounts that grant the reader a more expansive comprehension of Oneida History because of the different perspectives presented in the books.

There is an abundance of academic writing on the creation and application of the Indian New Deal. Historian Kenneth Philp’s book *John Collier’s Crusade for Indian Reform* provides an excellent account of Commissioner Collier’s personal life and Indian New Deal. Graham Taylor’s *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934-1945*, describes in detail the effect of the Indian Reorganization Act on American Indian tribes on a national level. In addition, Taylor’s work also accounts for the political history of the Indian Reorganization Act.

This paper seeks to accomplish two goals. First, this paper seeks to investigate the effects that the Indian New Deal and Indian Reorganization Act produced on the wellbeing and lifestyle of the Oneida Indians of Wisconsin. Second, this paper contends that the Indian Reorganization Act was a compelling milestone in the relationship between the government of the United States and the American Indian tribes.

To accomplish these goals, this paper is organized into four parts. First, this paper will investigate the history of the problems that had befallen the Wisconsin Oneida Indians until 1934, the year that the Indian Reorganization Act was enacted.
Second, the political history of the Indian New Deal and Indian Reorganization Act will be presented. Third, the effects of the Indian New Deal and the Indian Reorganization Act on the Oneida Indian tribe will be analyzed. Finally, this paper will conclude by deeming the significance of the Indian Reorganization Act on the Wisconsin Oneida Indians. In addition, this paper will judge the role of the Indian Reorganization Act in reforming the relationship between the American Indians and the United States Government.

**From New York to Wisconsin**

The plans of European Americans to move their Oneida neighbors from their provincial home of central New York State began to materialize in the early nineteenth century. Numerous societal motors spurred the relocation effort of the Oneidas of New York. In the early nineteenth century population pressures increased the desire to obtain Indian lands in New York State. Waves of European immigrants spurred the size of New York’s Population. The New York Population grew from 589,051 in 1800, to 1,372,813 in 1820, adding further demand for farmland in the New York countryside.³

The state of New York had granted the right of preemption to private land companies, whose ownerships were eager to reap the land and timber rights they held of Indian Territory currently occupied by the Oneida Indians.⁴ In 1810 seeking timber to harvest, David Ogden purchased the pre-emptive right to the land of the Indian

---


⁴ Ibid.
reservations from the Holland Land Company for the price of “fifty cents an acre.” The Holland Land Company had little success in gaining access to Indian land, yet the ambitious Ogden created a new plan to remove the Indians from the territory he sought to harvest. Ogden aspired to move the Iroquois tribes west, and had pinpointed the territory in the vicinity of Green Bay as ideal for the Indian relocation. David Ogden was later elected to the U.S. House of Representatives office in 1818. During his tenure as a Representative of New York, Ogden used his affluence to persuade the Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun, to relocate the Oneida Indians and the other Iroquois bands west.

The opinions and advice of the Episcopalian Missionary Eleazer Williams cajoled the Oneida Indians toward western relocation. In 1816, Eleazer Williams visited the Six Nations of the Iroquois; the Oneida Indians were particularly cordial to his visit. After taking observations of the living practices of the Oneida Indians, Williams went to New York City to seek the blessing of the Episcopal Church to become an Episcopal missionary to for the Oneida Indians. The bishop quickly fell into accordance with Williams’ plan for Christianization and commissioned Williams as Catechist and Lay Reader to the Oneida Indians.

Eleazer Williams was a strong orator, and speaking a fluent and well understood Mohawk, won favor with a faction of the Oneida tribe. On his return to Oneida territory, Williams used his position to combat the high level of paganism amongst the tribe; in

---

1816, four fifths of the Oneida were pagan. Williams won favor with a faction of the Oneida who converted to the Episcopal faith. This political faction became known as the First Christian Party. The First Christian Party centered on two issues, adherence to Episcopal branch of Christianity, and a strong proponent of an exodus out of New York State.

With his tribal status as religious leader, Williams began to promulgate allusions of grandeur of a unified Iroquois Nation in the territories of the west to Oneida tribesmen. Williams ascertained the new Iroquois nation would be a unification of cantons under a single Federal head. According to Williams’ testament to the Oneida Indians, the Federal level of the Iroquois Nation would be as grand and comparable to the government of the United States, complete with military, religious, and civic branches of government. Williams succeeded in convincing four of the five young hereditary Oneida chiefs in to joining his cause. Overall, Eleazer Williams’ message resounded with the younger tribal leaders and was rejected by the older generations. Yet with the approval of the younger generation, Williams continued in his attempt to create an Iroquois Nation in the western vicinity of the United States.

During the month of June 1821, Williams and an Iroquois delegation traveled west to survey the land west of Lake Michigan. The delegation was primarily composed of official tribal delegates representing the Oneida and Stockbridge Indians, only unofficial delegates from the other Six Nations accompanied the party. The Stockbridge

---

8 Ibid.
Indians, comprised of the remaining survivors of the Mohicans and other New England Indian bands, lived on a small piece of the Oneida reservation in New York State. The Stockbridge Indians were strong advocates for relocation west in order to expand their territorial holdings. In August 1821, the delegation managed to obtain a small cession of land on the Fox River from the Menominee and Winnebago tribes. This small territory was about four miles in width and was centered on modern day Little Chute.  

On their return to the Oneida reservation in New York State, the First Christian Party received heavy opposition from the Second Christian Party, and the Pagan Party. Both factions strongly opposed removal to the west. The other tribes of the Six Nations of the Iroquois concurred with the opinion of the Second Christian Party and the Pagan Party, and adamantly opposed removal or relocation. Red Jacket, the great Seneca orator and spokesmen of the Seneca Pagan Party, took on a prominent oppositional role against Iroquois relocation. In a letter from Secretary Calhoun to Ogden, Calhoun expressed the opposition of Red Jacket against removal: “and declared it his intention to live and die on the lands he now occupies.”

---

13 Ibid, 65.
Despite strong opposition, the First Christian Party under the leadership of Eleazer Williams continued their efforts toward permanent relocation to the territory in the vicinity of Green Bay. In the winter of 1822 and 1823, the First Christian Party relocated to the territory ceded to them on the Fox River. By 1825, the number of Oneidas living in Wisconsin had reached 150 inhabitants, all adherents to the Episcopal Faith.\(^{15}\)

While Williams was in Wisconsin, the Second Christian Party had converted to Methodism by a successful Methodist mission. To signify their ideological shift, the Second Christian Party renamed themselves as the Orchard Party. The newly created Orchard Party soon reversed their prior opinion on relocation to Wisconsin. In 1830, members of the Orchard Party began to immigrate to the Fox River area, and from 1833

---


lived on territory ceded to them near Green Bay called Duck Creek. By 1838, there were 654 Oneidas living on the reservation. Immigration of Oneidas continued to the Wisconsin reservation from both New York and Canada for the next fifty years.\textsuperscript{16}

The territory of the Wisconsin Oneidas was further limited with a treaty brokered on May 3, 1838. The 1838 Treaty declared: “From the foregoing cession there shall be reserved to the said Indians to be held as other Indian lands are held a tract of land containing one hundred (100) acres, for each individual, and the lines of which shall be so run as to include all their settlements and improvements in the vicinity of Green Bay.”\textsuperscript{17} As experienced by the Oneida Indians before in New York State, Wisconsin was also experiencing an influx of immigrants, who required farmland and sought to harvest lumber. Americans needed the land of the Oneida Indians for a second time. Ultimately, the Wisconsin Oneidas were reserved 65,436 acres from the 1838 treaty, officially creating the Oneida Indian Reservation.

During the rest of the mid-nineteenth century, the politics of faction overtook the Oneida reservation. Initially the faction between the Oneida reflected the religious division of the reservation. The Episcopalian First Christian Party and the Methodist Orchard Party settled areas of the reservation. The Episcopalians settled upstream along Duck Creek while the Methodists settled downstream. Intermarriage between the Methodists and the Episcopalians was frowned upon by both sides. The two factions developed stereotypical insults for each other. The Southern Methodists were considered to be hard-working but too rooted in Pagan beliefs, while the Northern

\textsuperscript{17} Treaty with the Oneida, February 3, 1383, 7 Stat. 566.
Episcopalians “tried to act like whites too much” and “forgot they are Indian like the rest of us.”

The Age of Allotment

The Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887 stipulated that the land on Indian reservations would be divided up amongst tribal members. The act sought to achieve a privatization of Indian reservations and served as a mechanism to assimilate American Indians into mainstream society. The Dawes Act granted allotments of land to each family living on the reservation. The size of each allotment was dependent and proportional to the size of each family. A stipulation in the act decreed that the titles of the land allotted to Indians were to be held in a trust for twenty-five years by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. During the trust-ownership, American Indians only had the freedom to decide the use for the land, but not the freedom to sell or mortgage the property. After the trust period expired American Indians were granted complete title to their land.

The trust period of Oneida allotments was scheduled to end in 1917; however the Indian Affairs Appropriations Act of 1906 escalated the process. The Appropriations Act of 1906 allowed the Secretary of the Interior “to issue a patent in fee to any Indian of the Oneida reservation in Wisconsin for the lands heretofore allotted him, and the issuance of such patent shall operate as a removal of all restrictions as to the sale,

---

18 Jack Campasi, “The Wisconsin Oneidas between Disasters.” The Oneida Indian Experience; Two Prospectives, eds. Jack Campisi and Laurence M. Hauptman (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 67
taxation and alienation of lands so patented."  

As a result, the trust period for most allottees immediately came to an end on the Oneida reservation; bringing a wave of change to the Oneida reservation.

The end of the trust period of Oneida allotments signaled an onset of outside land speculators looking to gain land now in the ownership of uneducated and destitute Oneida Indians. Land speculators often resorted to unethical schemes to gain the allotted property of the Oneida Indians. In some instances land speculators worked in collusion with corrupt Indian agents and Oneida Indians as well. Greedy land speculators encouraged the Oneida Indians to fall into debt and mortgage their properties to purchase superfluous items such as musical instruments, unneeded livestock, and automobiles. Some swindlers used direct methods to achieve land deeds. In one case a land speculator brought an Oneida family into town, and while the wife was out shopping, the land speculator brought the husband to the tavern. Once the Oneida man was drunk, the land speculator would cajole him into signing over the property deed.

Oneida Indians who collaborated with the “crooked land sharks” became known as “spotters.” Spotters came from the Episcopalian faction of the Oneida tribe, all were graduates of the Oneida Indian boarding schools. On Saturdays known as “injun day” day to the spotters because it was the day that the Oneida Indians traditionally went into town to buy supplies and visit the tavern, spotters would await the arrival of

---


21) Laurence M. Hauptman and Jack Campisi, “Talking Back: The Oneida Language and Folklore Project” 441.
unsuspecting Oneida Indians. The spotters received “a big roll of money so they could treat their prospective victims with intoxicating liquor,” from their collaborating land speculator. As Oneida Indian Guy Elm attested, once the spotter got an Oneida deed owner drunk:

“they then told them where they could get a loan on their property, to buy we’ll say [a] team of horses, or perhaps [a] few cows and also farm implements, or to buy materials to improve their homes. And still later the automobile caused the Oneida tribe [to become] landless.”

Later the spotter, acting as an interpreter, would ask the victim Oneida Indian to sign the loan contract. “At this stage of [the] game, some times the real estate man would try to slip the deed along with the rest of the papers to get the Indian’s signature on it too if possible.”

In most cases, the land speculators did not need to create a scheme to swindle land deeds from the Oneidas; they would only have to wait it for the taxation process to take its course. As a result of the allotment process, the lands now owned by private Oneida individuals now became subject to local property taxes. The towns of Hobart and Oneida needed taxation to finance local government institutions. In 1910, the Town of Oneida enlisted a taxation rate of $2.07 for every $100 of real estate. The property tax was an impossible burden to most Oneida landowners. The Oneida reservation was absent of jobs resulting in most Oneida Indians lacking an economic

---

22 Guy Elm, WPA Story, “Property and Loss of Land” The Oneida and the Age of Allotment. 242-243.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 James Oberly, “The Dawes Act and the Oneida Indian Reservation of Wisconsin” The Oneida Indians in the Age of Allotment, 195.
means to pay the tax. As a result the majority of the allotted land of the Oneida Indians was lost due to foreclosure.\textsuperscript{26}

The concept of taxation was foreign to the Oneida Indians, so much so that the Oneida language lacked a word to express the idea: “We used to have lots of horses and cattle, etc, but when they started to make us pay something every year [a tax], then we began to get behind. We finally had only ten acres left, when my husband died,” expressed Rachel Swamp.\textsuperscript{27} Ida Blackhawk attested, “they [the Oneida] did not know how to take the taxes,” and that many of the Oneida Indians “did not take it seriously” and neglected to make payment, only to later find their home and property evicted.\textsuperscript{28}

Organized political opposition toward the policy of allotment formulated on the Oneida reservation in 1909 through the Indian Party. The Indian Party, characterized by their socially conservative mindset, argued the towns of Oneida and Hobart had been illegally created, and that the county governments of Outagamie and Brown County had no jurisdiction to tax federally protected Indian lands.\textsuperscript{29} The Indian Party was in a staunch conflict with the Indians of the reservation who sought to modernize the tribe into American society. Many of the members in the progressive epoch of the Oneida tribe had been boarding school graduates, attesting to the power the institution asserted on the younger Oneida Indians. Despite the protests of the Indian Party, by

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Rachel Swamp, WPA Story “Before They Started to Pay Taxes” \textit{The Oneida Indians in the Age of Allotment, 1860-1920}, 241.
\textsuperscript{28} Ida Blackhawk, “Hard Times at Oneida” \textit{Oneida Lives}. 9-10.
\textsuperscript{29} Laurence, M Hampton, “The Wisconsin Oneidas and the Federal Competency Commission of 1917,” \textit{The Oneida Indians in the Age of Allotment, 1860-1920}, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006 ) 202-203. Sadly the Oneidas who heeded the advice of Indian Party, believing that taxation was illegal also lost their lands to eviction for the failure to pay taxes.
1917 the initial ending of the trust period, over 50,000 acres of the 65,436 acre reservation had been allotted and lost.  

Out of all the American Indian tribes, the Wisconsin Oneida, along with their neighbors the Winnebago, suffered the largest losses of land through the allotment process. While the Oneida and Winnebago tribes lost nearly all of their land during the early twentieth century, the National Resources Board estimated that almost half of all Indian allotments nationally had been lost between 1900 and 1934. The prominent cause for the loss of control of reservation land by American Indians was either the land was either sold or seized for nonpayment of taxes. In the resulting years, over 1,500 allotments of the Oneida reservation were lost. Before the Dawes Act, the Oneida tribe had controlled a reservation totaling 65,436 acres. By the time of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s election, the Oneida holdings had dwindled to ninety acres owned collectively and 700 acres owned privately by tribal members. As Guy Elm recollected by 1940:

“I would say that at the present time the whites own about 99 percent of the land that was once the original Oneida Reservation and the Oneidas still own [only] one percent of it. The 99 percent owned by the whites, 75 percent of it was acquired by means of crooked deals”

Reports of the Oneida Agency and School from the 1910s provide a descriptive account of life on the Oneida reservation at the end of allotment. In general it seems that life on the Oneida reservation was much more agreeable then on other Indian

32 Guy Elm, WPA Story “Property and Loss of Land” The Oneida and the Age of Allotment. 244.
reservations across the United States. The land of the Oneida reservation had economic viability, and “is well adapted for dairying, and there is ready and profitable market” of dairy products in towns near the reservation.\(^{33}\)

Throughout most of the 1910s, health of the Oneida Indians on the Wisconsin reservation was listed as “good” or “satisfactory.” In 1918, the Oneida reservation began to see a drop in the health of the tribe. The 1918 Report contended the Oneida Indians “had completely abandoned their old ideas as to the treatment of ailments,” and “the knowledge of the curative values of roots and herbs, upon which they depended in the primitive days, has been largely lost.” The author laments this fact because the Oneida Indians had been known “to live well past the century mark” when they lived in accordance to their old ways.\(^{34}\) The report continued to describe the problems caused by poor sanitation amongst the Oneida Indians:

“As they began to live more largely in houses, and for a longer period in one locality, the lack of sanitary surroundings together wit the poverty incident to life in a new country, and in some cases an over indulgence in stimulants, took a rather heavy toll, especially from the children and death from tuberculosis and kindred diseases have been large.”\(^{35}\)

Financially, a few Oneida Indians “were quite well-to-do, but the majority are poor as to worldly goods, lands etc., and rich only in children” declared the 1919 Report of the


\(^{35}\) Ibid.
Oneida. The largest economic contribution the Oneida Indians had been “in man power for the army and navy, the total number being about 140” in World War I.  

The “Roaring Twenties” and the Great Depression

After the end of World War I, many Americans sought to escape the drudgeries that the war had impressed upon their lives. Americans looked to escape from the harsh realities that had become evident after years of fighting a deadly War. To do so, many Americans embraced a lifestyle full centered in pleasure. The “Roaring Twenties” in America brought a lifestyle of decadence, full of frequent visits to the speakeasies, bootlegged liquor, and jazz music for Americans to indulge in. Sadly, the Oneida Indian tribe, like the other Indian tribes scattered across the United States, did not have the opportunity to partake in the “Roaring Twenties.” In contrast to mainstream America, during the 1920s American Indians suffered from a pandemic of poverty.

In 1929, the Merriam Report was publicly released to Congress and the Hoover Administration. The findings collected in the Merriam Report described the economic and social living conditions of the American Indians in the 1920s. The findings in the Merriam Report were not as convivial as the “Roaring Twenties” is historically remembered. The Merriam Report delivered the harsh reality of the incredibly impoverished status of the American Indians.

The Merriam Report cited the cause of the poverty amongst the Native Americans as “the economic basis of the primitive culture of the Indians has been

---

largely destroyed by the encroachment of white civilization.... They are by no means yet adjusted to the new economic and social conditions that confronted them.” The report continued to blame past government policy and programs that had intended to support the American Indians, as adversely affecting the American Indians to become dependent on government assistance:

“Several past policies adopted by the government in dealing with the Indians have been of a type which, if long continued, would tend to pauperize any race... The government undertook to feed them and to perform certain services for them which a normal people do for themselves. The Indians at the onset had to accept this aid as a matter of necessity, but promptly they came to regard it as a matter of right... They felt, and many of them still feel, that the government owes them a living having taken their lands from them, and they are under no obligation to support themselves. They have thus inevitably developed a pauper point of view.”

The abject living conditions of the American Indians of Wisconsin attracted the empathy of concerned Wisconsinites. These alarmed citizens enfranchised the cause of the Wisconsin Indians in their struggle against poverty and increased awareness of the Indian’s quandary through their writings in newspapers and magazines. In 1929, The Wisconsin Magazine in an effort to increase subscriptions, ran a subscription promotion advertisement that read, “Privation, Hunger Disease, Misery; These Are the Redman’s Heritage. Read The Facts About Indian Exploitation In The Wisconsin Magazine.” The advertisement prophesized an ominous future for the Indians of Wisconsin:

“If something is not done very soon for the betterment of the Indian’s living conditions on reservations throughout the United States these original

37 Ibid, 6.
38 Ibid, 7.
Americans will be swept away by disease and the race will become extinct- an eternal disgrace which white people could never hope to live down.”

*The Wisconsin Magazine* asserted that it would run articles germane to the issue of Native American poverty to help increase awareness, and claimed with “Wide Spread Publicity On This Important Question Will Accomplish Results.”

The staff editorial in the 1929 February edition of *The Wisconsin Magazine* blasted the current policy towards American Indians enacted by the Federal Government.

“Uncle Sam, in his capacity of loco parentis to the American Indian, has been a most thoughtless, heartless, and cruel parent... The Great White Father at Washington, referring generally to the federal government and specifically to the Indian Bureau, has been a stupid, selfish, calloused, short-sighted and brutal stepfather.”

Contrary to public perception, President Hoover acted quickly to enact the policy recommendations of the *Merriam Report* and was resolute to champion the cause of the destitute American Indian. In the spring of 1929, President Hoover appointed Charles J. Rhoads as Indian commissioner and Henry Scattergood as assistant commissioner. Religious Quakers, Rhoads and Scattergood had achieved world notoriety for their leadership in humanitarian efforts in the reconstruction programs of Europe after World War I. Although the Great Depression would significantly stress to the allocation of government funds, the Hoover administration managed to increase funding to Indian Services from fifteen million dollars in 1928 to twenty-eight million dollars in 1931. The funding was intended to improve American Indians health.

---

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
education, and agricultural production. Sadly the bureaucracy spent the bulk of the money on extended the size of its employee force, which grew by 300%, rather then allocate the money for Commissioner Rhoads’ intended purposes. This type of inefficiency and corruption came to characterize the Bureau of Indian Affairs under the Hoover administration despite the benign intention of the President and his Quaker leadership.

The onset of the Great Depression compounded the problems of the poverty stricken reservation of the Oneida. By 1930, the loss of jobs on both the reservation and nearby cities embroiled the reservation in economic turmoil. With fewer jobs and more competition for those that were available, American Indians were often the first to lose employment. Because of their social status, American Indians were also the least likely to be hired. Oneida Indians who lived in the cities of Wisconsin, such as Green Bay and Milwaukee also lost their jobs. With no where else to go, Oneidas who resided in cities returned to the Oneida reservation. The immigration of jobless tribe members added further stress to the meager economic resources and available jobs. The population influx also intensified stress and conflict between family members, resulting in an onerous time period for the Wisconsin Oneidas both economically and socially.

By 1930, the Oneida families who owned acreage lived on a plot of land averaging ten acres. This figure stood defiant against the results of a farming survey

---

conducted by the State of Wisconsin. According to the agricultural survey, at least eighty acres were necessary to sustain a farm economically.\textsuperscript{45}

The testament of Guy Elm, an Oneida Indian who lived in Green Bay, and then later on the Oneida reservation once the Great Depression was in full swing, captures the hardships that many Oneida men had to work through, commuting to find any work that they could:

“We kept getting poorer. We thought that perhaps the times would eventually get better, but it got worse instead. We finally decided we would have to move out in the country to save some expenses. So we did, in 1930. I bought an old house for seventy-five dollars, tore it down, and rebuilt it on my ten acres I inherited from my father as my share of his estate. My wife and I cut out the expensives here and there so that we were able to reduce the general expenses to about half of what we were paying in the city. We went without lots of things that we were used to having in the city.”\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{The Appointment of John Collier}

John Collier was born in Atlanta Georgia in 1884. An erudite student, he graduated Valedictorian from Atlanta High School where he claimed he “learned nothing.”\textsuperscript{47} Later, Collier enrolled in Columbia University as a special graduate student in 1902. At Columbia, John Collier lived the life of a young intellectual, filling his mind with new and exciting philosophical ideas. Collier accredits Frederick Nietzsche as the most influential thinker in shaping his own system of thinking. Nietzsche’s concept of the ‘superman’ greatly appealed to Collier and directed him towards releasing the “yet

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Interview with Guy Elm (conducted by Morris Swadesh) “Struggling in the Depression,” \textit{Oneida Lives}, Herbert Lewis ed. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2005) 79.
\textsuperscript{47} John Collier. \textit{From Every Zenith; A Memoir}. (Denver, CO: Sage Books, 1963) 34.
unrealized potential” in himself and others. The writings of William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman “swiftly overwhelmed my conscious,” and inclined Collier to embark on a life inline with nature, directing his attention to the lifestyles of American Indians.

Historian Kenneth Philp described the ethos of John Collier: “[He] was a reform Darwinist and self-made sociologist who argued that man must mold society’s future through deliberate innovation and individual creativity.”

In the autumn of 1920, Collier left his wife and three children to live for a year with the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. The tribal lifestyle of the Pueblo Indians had a dramatic impact upon Collier. Collier believed the Pueblo Indians’ lifestyle maintained a communal and cooperative element, and they had managed to be both “communists and individualist at one and the same time.” He viewed the lifestyle of the Pueblo Indians as the model for American society, because it did not concern itself with material possessions, but rather sought to achieve beauty, adventure, joy, comradeship, and a connection with God.

Later as Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Collier would attempt to strengthen tribal relationships of all American tribes to emulate his perception of a successful communal lifestyle achieved by the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. Collier contended “the most universal problem of man, is, and has been, throughout his

48 Ibid, 37. In his first year at Columbia, Collier enrolled in a Graduate French Literature class. Collier did not speak French yet learned the language easily as the class progressed.
50 Ibid, 3.
51 Ibid, 119.
hundred thousand or more years of history, that he is primordially, positively, undefeatedably social.”  

After winning the Presidency, Franklin Roosevelt appointed Harold L. Ickes as the Secretary of the Interior. Ickes, a progressive “Bull Moose” Republican, was a part of a small convention called by President Roosevelt to discuss land conservation in his forthcoming “New Deal.” After the meeting, President Roosevelt asked Ickes to remain in the room while the other men left the room. Then, after the others had exited, President Roosevelt dauntlessly declared, “You are my Secretary of the Interior.”

After Ickes’ appointment, Senator Joe Robinson, the Democratic leader in Senate, asked Ickes to nominate Edgar Meritt, the Assistant Indian Commissioner from 1913-1928 to the position of Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Ickes, who was not particularly fond of Meritt, thought Collier as a candidate for the position, and encouraged Collier to submit his name for consideration. On Ickes’ proposal Collier reminisced that “The Indian Commissioner was apparently to be either Edgar Meritt, a fatal choice, or myself, a choice which in my own mind was clouted with doubt.”

John Collier loathed Merritt and described him as “tireless, impetuous, and very ignorant.” After Collier consulted his son Charles, who insisted that his father was capable for the position, Collier agreed to Ickes’ request. Shortly after Collier’s consent to be considered for Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Ickes quickly made up his mind to his selection for commissioner. Secretary Ickes publicly announced that John Collier

\[52\] Ibid.
\[53\] Ibid, 170.
\[54\] Ibid.
would be appointed to the position of Indian Commissioner and that he would not submit any further nominations to the Senate.  

Collier’s appointment to Commissioner of Indian affairs sparked controversy in the United States Senate. Many U.S. Senators of both political parties had reservations with Collier’s appointment, largely because these senators supported other assimilationist candidates. An article in the *New York Sun* articulated the opposition Collier faced politically. “The puissant Senators, Thomas and Gore of Oklahoma—where dwell nearly on half of the American Indians—whetted their knives” in opposition to Collier. “Land, oil and water companies did everything but offer a bounty for his skin,” and former Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall “used to bark like a coyote at the mention of his name.”

President Roosevelt was pivotal in removing opposition to Collier’s appointment by arranging for a “showdown” conference between Senator Robinson and Secretary Ickes. Senator Robinson supported Edgar Meritt for the position of Indian Commissioner. Roosevelt beguiled Robinson into withdrawing his support for Meritt: “You know what a stubborn man I have in Ickes, and you know the announcement he has made” declared President Roosevelt to his Democratic subordinate. Senator Robinson prudently complied with his President’s wishes and ended his advocacy of Meritt.

---

57 John Collier, *Every Zenith*, 170-171. President Roosevelt and John Collier had little direct contact during their respective offices. Collier wrote “the years after Pearl Harbor I was careful never to take up his time in anything.” President Roosevelt was immensely confident in the discretion of Secretary Ickes and as the quote proves, backed his decisions adamantly.
The authoritative words of President Roosevelt echoed throughout the halls of Congress, and effectively removed any opposition to Collier’s appointment. On April 20th 1933, Collier was approved unanimously by the U.S. Senate. With his appointment, Collier set to work; he needed to ameliorate political support from both politicians and Indians alike for the reforms he intended to implement. These intended reforms would later take the name of the Indian Reorganization Act.

**The Hayward Indian Congress**

John Collier faced ample criticism and skepticism for his proposed Indian Reorganization Act from politicians in Washington D.C and American Indians as well. In an attempt to gain stronger support from the American Indian tribes, the intended

---

58 “Photograph of John Collier” in *Indians at Work*, July-August-September 1942.
audience of his legislation, Collier embarked on a series of ten Indian Congresses, between March 2\textsuperscript{nd} and April 24. During these congresses, Collier explained the merits of the Indian Reorganization Act, and attempted to persuade Indian tribal leaders for their support of the legislation.\textsuperscript{59}

Although Collier was not present at the Hayward Congress, the Indian congress the Oneida attended; Collier had successfully defended the merits of the Indian Reorganization Act at other Indian congresses in front of more hostile Indian audiences. At the Plains Congress in Rapid City, South Dakota, on March 2\textsuperscript{nd} 1934, Collier orated that the new Indian legislation would be one of partnership with the American Indians rather then government control: “We intend to act in partnership with the Indians and we are not going to act unless the Indians are willing to go with us.”\textsuperscript{60} Collier outlined the two major problems the Indian Reorganization Act moved to resolve: “first, that the Indians of the United States, including your tribes, have for two lifetimes been steadily losing their property becoming poorer and poorer on the whole.” and second:

“the Indians of the United States are living under a condition which puts them at the mercy of the Indian Bureau. The guardianship of the Federal Government over Indian life, which was intended to be means of making the Indians both prosperous and free, has been having the opposite effect and has been making them poor while they were deprived of their freedom.”\textsuperscript{61}

Collier believed the Indian Reorganization Act would alleviate both problems. At Rapid City, Collier avowed that he was convinced that Indian Reorganization Act would be well

\textsuperscript{60} Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Testimony Taken at Rapid City, South Dakota, March 2, 1934.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
received by all Indians, stating “it is my belief that the Indians of the United States are going to be practically one hundred percent in agreement before we are done.”

The final of the ten Indian Congresses took place in Hayward, Wisconsin on April 23rd and 24th, 1934. The congress at Hayward was intended to allow the Bureau of Indian Affairs to consult on and explain to the Indians of the Great Lakes the merits and goals of Indian Reorganization Act. Strangely, John Collier did not attend the Indian congress at Hayward, leaving his assistant William Zimmerman to preside over the event. Collier was busy in Washington preparing for the Indian Reorganization Act to be introduced to Congress. Amongst the Indians in attendance were eight Oneida tribal leaders: E. L. Hill, William Skenandore, Junas Schuyler, Agnes Fox, Andrew Beechtree, Martin F. Wheelock, William Cornelius, and Charles Cornelius.

William Zimmerman opened the conference at Hayward by delivering a letter written by President Roosevelt to Representative Howard, the Chair of Indian Affairs in the House of Representatives, to the Indian audience. The letter summarized and praised the Indian Reorganization Act, in which Howard was a legislative author. The words of the President, who was held in the highest regard, carried strongly amongst the Indians gathered at Hayward. The letter set a mood of acceptance amongst the Indians for Collier’s proposal.

---

62 Ibid, Commissioner Collier’s words would later come to haunt him, as the Indian Reorganization Act was heavily criticized and rejected by the prominent Indian Tribes such as the Navajo, and the “Five Civilized Tribes” of Oklahoma. These Indian tribes were heavily assimilated and saw a return to old ways as a path to enslavement.

64 Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Testimony Taken at Hayward Wisconsin, April 23, 1934.

65 Ibid.
“My Dear Mr. Howard: My interest has been attracted to your bill, H. R. 7902, because of the virile American principles on which it is based. Opportunity for self-determination for the Indians in handling their property by providing modern corporate management, participation in local government, a more liberal educational system through day schools and advanced health measures are provided in the bill."\textsuperscript{66}

At Hayward, tribal leaders of the Great Lakes Indian bands expressed their concern of the government’s intention with the proposed Indian Reorganization Act. Most of the tribal leaders voiced concern over the future protection of their right to hunt and take game. Bad River Band delegate Earl Morrison captured the sentiment of most of the Indians concerned with treaty rights in a passage he addressed to Bureau’s commission. “Can we ask the [Roosevelt] administration to safeguard our rights as they were stated in the treaties? If you aren’t going to respect our rights on this question we can’t put much faith in your promises.”\textsuperscript{67}

At the conclusion of the two day session, the Indians in attendance at the Hayward Indian Congress came to embrace the Indian Reorganization Act. Support for Collier’s legislation weighed heavily on the oration skills of General William J. Kershaw, a Menominee Indian, and a prominent attorney in Wisconsin. The oration of Kershaw rallied the Indian Leaders of the Great Lakes toward consenting to the “Indian New Deal.” Kershaw was quoted by the \textit{Ashland Daily News} that the Federal Reorganization Act was “the only hope for the American Indian.”\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{66} Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, \textit{Letter of President Roosevelt to Representative Howard, delivered at Hayward Wisconsin}, April 23, 1934.
\textsuperscript{67} “Indians State Their Case,” in the \textit{Ashland Daily Press}, April 34, 1934.
\textsuperscript{68} “Indians of Region Considering Their New Opportunity,” in the \textit{Ashland Daily Press}, April 35, 1934.
The Oneida contingent was decidedly supportive of Collier’s initiatives, and believed that John Collier was “going to be the Abraham Lincoln to the Indians.” At the conclusion of the second day of the meeting Chief William Skenadore delivered a resolution to William Zimmerman, the chair of meeting. The resolution contained a spirit of optimism and hope in the efforts of the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs, lavishly praising Commissioner Collier:

We will be forever thankful to you as the new Commissioner of Indian affairs, as the tried and true friend of the Indians, which they have sorely been in need of for a century. We have known for many years that you were studying and fighting hard to bring about a betterment of the conditions of the Indians throughout the country. And we are hoping and struggling with you so that you will realize our desires.70

The Oneida Resolution in support of Collier’s actions had been passed on March 14, 1934 unanimously by five hundred Oneida Indians. The text in the resolution suggests that the Oneidas had been following the actions of Commissioner Collier and President Roosevelt closely and thoroughly understood the Indian Organization Act. The preamble of the resolution openly praised President Roosevelt for being “instrumental in having the Indians to be included in the Emergency Relief and Civil Works Programs, which relief we have received this winter was surely appreciated by the Oneidas.” The relief received from New Deal programs, “which relief has never before been accorded to us,” was the only time the Oneida Indians could recollect that the government had actually provided relief to the reservation. The date the resolution

---

69 U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Oneida Resolution delivered by Chief William Skenandore at Hayward Wisconsin, April 24, 1934. For the complete text of the resolution, consult the Appendix.
70 Ibid.
indicates that the resolution passed was approximately six weeks before the Oneida delegation had consulted government agents at Hayward.\textsuperscript{71} Clearly the Oneida delegation had made up their mind on the Indian Reorganization Act and John Collier before their attendance of the Hayward Indian Congress.

The Resolution the Oneida Indians delivered at Hayward contained eighteen points. The eighteen points listed the Oneida Indians’ understanding of the goals of the Indian Reorganization Act. The subject of the first five points in the resolution dealt with the problems caused by allotment and the speculative return of these lands to the Oneida reservation. The Oneida Indians saw the Indian Reorganization Act as a chance to regain reservation territory:

\begin{itemize}
\item “1. Due to the destitution of Indians in general, brought about by the General Allotment Act of 1887,
\item 2. That it is the intention of the new administration to have the Government re-assert its obligations and safeguard the Indians from extinction, and their properties.
\item 3. To stop the divesting of the lands from the Indians.
\item 4. To provide lands for those Indians that have become landless so that they again can have homes.
\item 5. No more lands to be allotted to individual Indians.”\textsuperscript{72}
\end{itemize}

Collier continued his pursuit for popular support of the Indian Reorganization Act by seeking out publicity of his cause on a national level. In a June 10, 1934 letter to the \textit{New York Times}, headlined “Our Indian Policy has Definite Aims,” Collier defended his pending legislation. Collier continued to describe the fallacies in prior Indian policy:

\textit{“That policy was a tragic failure. It stamped the Indian as an inferior being whose...”}

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
person and property could and should be taken.”  

Collier continued in the letter to enumerate further reasons justifying need for his legislation, citing the high mortality and disease rates of Indians and their low per capita incomes. Collier used the specific example of the per capita family income of Oklahoma Indians of less then 200 dollars per family as the prototype problem that many American Indians faced.

*Time* magazine also wrote a piece on Collier’s Indian Congresses. The article depicted the legislation and Indian response to the proposed legislation in a positive connotation. The article included quotes from prominent Indian tribes such as the Sioux, Navajo, and Blackfoot in adamant support of Collier. “If what is told us is true, this is the Indian’s salvation. Let us call on the Great Spirit to make it so” declared Rides-at-the-Door of the Blackfoot. Edward Quick Bear of the Rosebud Sioux stated, “The old way leads to the end of the trail. We can lose nothing by trying the new way.”  

Now with the perceived support of the American Indians, and perhaps most importantly the mandate of confidence from President Roosevelt, the position of Collier’s prized Indian Reorganization Act was strengthened as it went to the Congress to be voted on.

**The Creation of Indian Reorganization Act and Indian New Deal**

The Indian Reorganization Act’s formal legislative title is the Wheeler-Howard Act, named after Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, and Representative Edgar Howard of Nebraska,
the Democratic chairman of the Senate and House Committees on Indian Affairs. Under the direction of these two Democratic legislators, the committees of Congress would alter Commissioner Collier’s premonition of the Indian Reorganization Act.

In Congressional Committee, the Wheeler-Howard Act went under strong scrutiny by the Congress. Certain aspects of Collier’s original proposal had been omitted. Collier had intended for the Department of the Interior to have a strong ability to acquire allotted lands for the purpose of tribal consolidation. The strength of this ability was heavily diluted by the Congress while in committee. In addition, Indian tribes were denied the power to gain sovereignty over heirship lands, and the creation of a judicial court to arbitrate between Indian tribes and the government was omitted. Collier would later lament these loses as fundamental causes for some of the failures of the Indian Reorganization Act, describing the loss as “a major disaster to the Indians, the Indian Service, and the program.”

Debate on the Wheeler-Howard Act began in the house on June 15th, 1934. The debate was lead by its namesake Representative Howard. The bill passed the Congress with surprisingly little resistance, resulting with a vote of 258 in favor and 88 opposed. The final Wheeler-Howard Bill lacked the vested power that Collier believed was needed to enact the Indian reform. The passed bill “makes everything optional with the Indians, whereas the original bill reposed exclusively on mandatory provisions” declared Representative Ayers of Montana during the debate.

---

76 Graham Taylor. The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism, 28.
77 Congressional Record. 73 Congress, 2nd Session, 1933. 12165.
Finally on June 18 1934 the Wheeler-Howard Act was signed into law by President Roosevelt. The process of returning land to the rule of tribal sovereignty remained the focal point of the legislation. The first section of the legislation prescribed:

“That hereafter no land of any Indian reservation, created or set apart by treaty of agreement with the Indians, Act of Congress, Executive order, purchase or otherwise shall be allotted in severalty to any Indian,”\(^78\) officially ending the policy of allotment that had inflicted a checkerboard plague of land ownership amongst the Indian reservations of the nation, and had nearly eliminated the holdings of the Oneida Indians.

Next in the act were stipulations that dealt with the returning of property holdings to Indian tribes. Section three embedded the Secretary of the Interior with the power “restore to tribal ownership the remaining surplus lands of any Indian reservation heretofore opened, or authorized to be open to sale, or any other form of disposal by Presidential proclamation, or by any of the public-land laws of the United States.”

Section five of the act appropriated two million dollars a year for the acquisition of lands for Indian tribal ownership, and section six allocated ten million dollars for the creation of a credit fund established to provide loans to finance tribal economic activity.\(^79\)

The final sections of the Indian Reorganization Act dealt with the creation of tribal governments. The creation of tribal governments, outlined in section sixteen, decreed: “Any Indian tribe or tribes, residing on the same reservation, shall have the right to organize for its common welfare, and may adopt an appropriate constitution and bylaws, which shall become effective when ratified by a majority vote of the adult

\(^78\) The Indian Reorganization Act, (Public--NO.383--73D Congress S. 3645) June 18, 1934.
\(^79\) Ibid.
members of the tribe."\(^{80}\) Section sixteen called for a political referendum of each tribe on the question of whether or not adopt a constitution, and mandated a time period of one year, later extended to two years as a deadline for the adoption of a constitution.\(^{81}\)

Commissioner Collier was optimistic to the prospects of the Indian Reorganization Act and wrote of his intention for the legislation in his first report as Commissioner of Indian Affairs:

> “We are now at work developing a policy which we believe to be broad enough and sound enough to achieve, if continued, the purpose for which the Indian Service has always worked- The Indian’s adjustment to his new world and a termination of his “problem.” That policy is based on two ideas- organization and a fuller use of land. Out of organization will come greater participation in the management of property and domestic affairs; and out of land use, which contemplates the purchase of land for those now landless to carry on operations, will come better living conditions.”\(^{82}\)

With the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act, Collier directed his attentions towards utilizing other New Deal programs to benefit American Indians. The services of other New Deal programs in collaboration with the Indian Reorganization Act collectively became known as the Indian New Deal.

John Collier worked to utilize other New Deal programs for the betterment of American Indians. The first federal agency Commissioner Collier worked to include American Indians into was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a government program established in 1933 to put the nation’s unemployed to work. The CCC generally worked

\(^{80}\) Ibid.

\(^{81}\) Ibid.

\(^{82}\) U.S. Department of the Interior. Bureau of Indian Affairs. *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1933-1938*, 248. Collier uses the word problem deceptively in his report. Assimilation was still the goal of American Indian policy of many politicians, to them “problem” meant the failure of Indians to integrate into society, while to Collier “problem” meant the problems that are facing the Indians from practicing their tribal way of life.
on the construction and maintenance of public buildings and utilities. Collier advocated that a separate program of the CCC be developed for American Indians, because he believed that Indians work better in communal groups. President Roosevelt and Congress heeding Collier’s request, and in 1933, $5,875,000 was allocated for Indian conservation programs under the auspices of the CCC. Most programs under the CCC were planned in the states of Arizona, Oklahoma, Montana, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Washington.\(^\text{83}\)

CCC funds also financed the publication of *Indians at Work*, John Collier’s bi-monthly magazine. *Indians at Work* sought to stimulate conservation and economic interest in its reader and provided an avenue for open discussion on issues pertaining to Indian Affairs. The magazine was popular during the 1930s and 1940s, boasting a circulation of 12,000 subscribers.\(^\text{84}\)

A bureaucratic craftsman, Collier continued to mold existing federal programs to serve the American Indian. Collier convinced his political ally, Henry A. Wallace, the secretary of agriculture, to allocate $800,000 for the purchase of livestock to establish animal herds amongst the Indian tribes. Indians were also included under the Federal Energy Relief Administration, a program which allocated a half-billion dollars to state and city governments for relief purposes. The Civil Works Administration and the Public Works Administration agencies employed thousands of Indians in the construction and maintenance of public buildings. The CWA employed 4,423 Indians in the winter of 2004 to repair government and tribal buildings on reservations, while the PWA focused

\(^{83}\) Kenneth Philip, *John Collier’s Crusade for Indian Reform*, 120-121.

\(^{84}\) Ibid, 122.
on the construction of public works. With its large budget of $3.3 billion dollars, the PWA brought many American Indians into employment during the harsh times of the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{85}

As the Great Depression stooped in America for yet another year, in 1934, Congress passed another further relief measure, the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act. The act allowed President Roosevelt to spend an additional five billion dollars for relief projects. Collier was quick to request fifteen million dollars of the Energy Relief Appropriations Act be reserved for projects affecting American Indians. Collier was again successful in his plea, and American Indians were included in the Works Progress Administration. The WPA would employee over 10,700 Indians throughout the program’s history.\textsuperscript{86}

\textbf{Results on the Oneida Reservation}

One of the primary goals of the Indian Reorganization Act was to eliminate the system of land allotment and to help American Indian tribes rebuild their land holdings. Sadly, the Indian Reorganization Act did not reach its goal of returning property to tribal control on a massive scale, largely due to lack of funding. The Indian Reorganization Act appropriated a million dollars per fiscal year for the acquisition of land for Indian tribes. The purchasing of territory for the American Indian tribes began in 1936, but by 1938 the one million dollar budget for the acquisition of land was slashed in half to only five

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 123-124. \\
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 125.
hundred thousand dollars. The budget for the acquisition of new Indian territory would never recover and soon would be forgotten as the increasing fiscal demands of World War II took precedent.

In 1933, American Indian territorial holdings in the United States lingered to only 49,000,000 acres, “much of it waste and desert.” By 1938 American Indian landholdings totaled to 51,540,307 acres, resulting in a net gain of only 2,540,307 acres for American Indians. Even these minute territorial gains are misleading to the actual effectiveness of the Indian Reorganization Act toward the purchasing of new lands. Over half of the land acquired was drawn from the Public Domain. In addition, reservations that suffered from extensive allotment, did not receive assistance. Over forty-three percent of the land granted back to Indian control was located in the states of Nevada and Arizona, rather than in the reservations that had suffered extensively from allotment, which the Wisconsin Oneida reservation would qualify under.

The Oneida Indians received 1,200 acres under the Indian Reorganization Act for the reestablishment of a communal reservation. Private home ownership also increased marginally for the Oneida Indians of Wisconsin; largely through the auspices of loan programs of the New Deal. Mrs. James Skenadore, an Oneida living on the reservation during the Great Depression, attributed her survival during the distressed time period and proceeding years to New Deal policy. According to her testament, without New Deal assistance the Skenadores would not have been able to afford a proper home.

---

88 Ibid.
“We appreciate a lot getting a chance to own a place this way because if we were to pay cash for a place like this we certainly would never own a home. The New Deal is certainly a good organization for us poor people. Before we got this place we were paying around five dollars per month, but there was no sign of ever owning the place even if we lived on the place for a hundred years. And here we have a new house, a good drilled well, and are paying only five dollars per month, and the principal is getting smaller every payment.”

Mary Hill, an Oneida who lived continuously on the reservation affirmed the positive effects brought by the Indian Reorganization Act and the Indian New Deal. Like Mrs. Skenadore, Mary Hill avowed that without the New Deal housing program, the Hills would have remained living in desolate conditions. Deduced from her testament, it seems that life was still quite difficult for the Hill family, yet the Indian New Deal did remove the Hill family from the destitution of rent and brought the prospects of building a new home, something unthinkable of, in the decades prior.

“Early this spring we moved into a little shack we are now allotted on New Deal land. We managed to squeeze into the little place just so we do live in a place that we can call our own and stop paying rent. And since the place is so small and the older children wanted to work out and make money I told them to do so, but I will expect ten dollars from each one of you this fall, as the materials for a new house we are putting up will have to be part paid and it is a benefit for every one of us... We borrowed $350 to buy the house material, and we are putting it up ourselves.”

Oneida Indian William Cornelius declared that the Indian New Deal was the first proposed government legislation to actually work as intended and it did not suffer from massive corruption, which was the precedent in interaction between the Oneida Indians and the Federal government until the onset of the Indian New Deal.

“At one time my father was telling of how the government sent farm machinery and all kinds of tools to the Oneidas to be distributed to them by the chiefs. All

---

91 Interview with Mrs. John Skendore (conducted by Morris Swadesh) July 2, 1941, Oneida Lives, 128.
92 Interview with Mary Hill (conducted by John Skenandore) June 25, 1941, Oneida Lives, p. 123.
the chiefs got machinery like binders and mowers and cultivators, and some of this went to the relatives of the chiefs. If a poor man who was not a relative came along he got a hoe or an ax or a corn knife, which may be worth not more then a dollar, but the chiefs and their relatives got over a hundred dollars’ worth of machinery each. The only time this did not happen is now when the New Deal started to give out land to Oneidas. It seemed that it was given to anyone who really wanted it, so they applied for it first. It is going just as the names have been taken down. This is the best it has ever been done. ”

Wilson Cornelius continued to discuss how the democratic institutions instilled in the Oneida community as a result of the Indian Reorganization Act prevented a tyrannical tribal leader from ascending to control of the New Deal housing allotments, providing evidence of the intangible effects that the Indian Reorganization Act had ingrained into the Oneida community.

“The man who was the chairman was going to work that [corrupt] way and everybody caught on to it. He gave land to his brothers and other relatives and built houses for them, but after the election another man was elected for the office of chairman and new directors were elected so everything took a change. The new officers took the list of applicants, the first come, first served. It made no difference if he was related or not. He was given the land and a house was started for him. Everyone seems to be satisfied the way things are going.”

Although the testaments recorded in the WPA Language Project suggest that some Oneida Indians received land through the Indian New Deal, many Oneida Indians remained landless. A 1942 report of the Oneida Tribal Council outlines the actual reality of Oneida land ownership: “There are 92 applications for land, totaling 5,000 acres. There are eight families assigned land during the past year. We wish to help everybody but what can we do when there is no land to assign.”

93 Interview with Wilson Cornelius (conducted by Stadler King) June 17, 1941, Oneida Lives, p. 122
94 Ibid, 122-123.
The Indian New Deal brought marginal economic opportunity to women. Classes in native beadwork and basketry funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs encouraged Oneida women to learn an economic skill and to return to tribal customs lost with time.

In a 1938 article, the Milwaukee Journal covered the creation of a craft program on the Oneida reservation and depicted a scenario of cultural alarm. “Instruction in Indian craftsmanship is necessary because the present group of Oneidas, little more than 100 years after their ancestors left New York State to settle in the fertile valley bordering the Fox River, comprise a “lost generation” in the tribal arts and crafts.”96 The article continued to provide additional evidence to thematically emphasize the extent of the loss of artesian customs:

“In Indian agents were recently forced to search for an Oneida familiar with the construction of the cornhusk dolls, long the favorites of Oneida children... Here and there in this village are women who continued the work of tribal craftsmanship. The government now depends upon these few to spread their knowledge.”97

Finally, the article stressed the importance of the New Deal program to its American audience: “If the white man’s ways made the Oneida a better farmer, housekeeper and citizen, they probably made him a worse Indian. The arts and crafts program is an attempt to give what is Indian back to the Indians.”98

The Works Progress Administration’s Oneida Language and Folklore Project brought not only economic opportunity to the reservation but also spurred a cultural resurgence. The Oneida Language and Folklore project was the idea of Morris Swadesh

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
in 1938. Swadish was a professor at the University of Wisconsin in linguistics, specializing in American Indian Languages. Swadish conceived of the idea in 1938 and he later applied for funding for the project through the Works Progress Administration. The project began in February, 1939 and lasted until 1942. The WPA Writers Project hired fifteen Oneida Indians to record stories and accounts of tribal members, and translate and write the stories in the Oneida language. Pictured below is the staff of the WPA Writers Project.

With the onset of the Great Depression, Oneida Indians came to rely on government’s programs for economic sustenance. In 1933, the Oneida Indians received their first financial assistance from the government, a $2,000 check. The next year the Oneida Indians received a herd of 1,500 sheep through the Federal Relief Corporation

---

99 Floyd Lounsbury, “Recollections of the Works Progress Administration’s Oneida Language and Folklore Project” *The Oneida Indian Experience, Two Perspectives*. 131-132.
100 Photograph of the Workers of the Oneida WPA Writers Project, in *The Oneida Indians of Wisconsin*. 15.
Program. In 1935, the Federal government financed a building repair project on the reservation, in which 169 buildings were renovated on the reservation, at a cost of $12,501.98. Many Oneidas received employment through the CCC and WPA programs; two hundred Oneida were employed in the Writers Project and construction of a dam in Kaukauna, Wisconsin. By 1939, 1,300 out of the 1,500 of the Oneida Indians on the Wisconsin reservation received some type of government aid.  

Politically, the Wisconsin Oneida followed the stipulations and recommendations of the Indian Reorganization Act adamantly and worked to adopt a tribal constitution. The creation of the constitution was a duty performed by Oneida tribal elders in collaboration with Indian agents. The Oneidas’ constitutional proposal was approved by the Secretary of the Interior Ickes on October 14, 1936. Secretary Ickes’ approval denoted the clearance of political hurdles before the constitution could be voted on and ratified by members of the Oneida tribe. The constitution was easily adopted on November 14, 1936 with a vote of 790 in favor and only 16 opposed. The voting total also met the stipulation that at least thirty percent of all eligible voters must participate in the ratification process. The high approval rating indicates that the opinion of the Oneida Indians toward the legislation was still as adamant as it was during Collier’s Indian congress at Hayward years earlier.

The constitution drafted by the Oneida Indian tribe was an austere document, simple and short. Included in the document were five articles. The first article defined

the territory of the Oneida reservation and left the door open to the expanse of reservation stipulating the tribe’s jurisdiction “to such other lands as may be hereafter added thereto within.” The second article defined Oneida tribal membership and decreed that membership would be given to existing tribal members and “any descendant of a member of the tribe who is of at least one-quarter Indian blood.”

The third and forth articles created the general tribal council of the Oneida tribe. The tribal council was allocated the powers to perform legislative, executive, and judicial acts. Amongst its substantive diverse powers were to “To negotiate with the Federal, State, and local governments... manage all economic affairs and enterprises of the Oneida tribe of Wisconsin,” and to “To promulgate and enforce ordinances” to maintain order on the reservation.

The constitution was clear to stipulate one action that the tribal council could never embark upon, the selling of tribal lands. Article VI, Section I stipulated that the tribal council must “veto any sale, disposition, lease or encumbrance of tribal lands, interests in lands, or other tribal assets of the tribe.” The Oneida made sure in their constitution that they would never repeat the loss of lands that had occurred to them under the Dawes Act and the allotment system.

The creation of the institution of tribal government is the Indian Reorganization Act and John Collier’s most significant accomplishment for improving the livelihood of American Indians. Before the Indian Reorganization Act, the Oneida were at the mercy

103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
of Bureau of Indian Affairs in political decisions. With the creation of tribal governments the Oneida Indians now had a direct hand in the future of their tribe.

Evidence suggests that the Oneida Indians were quick to take control of their own affairs and drafted an economic policy for the reservation in 1942. The Oneida Indians wanted to encourage the raising of livestock on the reservation, and suggested the building of a canning factory, limestone quarry, a cooperative store and an ammunitions plant. The Oneida Indians advocated for an ammunitions plant on the reservation because the Oneida Indians were natural patriots who had “been in every war this country has ever had” and “we Oneidas are still ready to defend our country by one hundred percent.”¹⁰⁶ In addition to their patriotism, the Oneidas were attracted to the high wage of one dollar an hour that defense work provided.¹⁰⁷

**World War II, the Demise of the Indian New Deal**

The onset of World War II dramatically altered the lifestyle for the Oneidas. Although all Americans from every nationality and walk of life were considerably affected by the transition into war time America, the American Indians were particularly so. In addition to burdens imposed on all Americans during the war, including the conscription of their young men, the movement of women to war time jobs, and the rationing of materials; American Indians saw the Indian New Deal, their economic lifeline during the time period, fall into obscurity amongst the priorities of the National

¹⁰⁷ Forty cents an hour was the prevalent wage for Indian labor in the Green Bay vicinity.
Government. The Indian New Deal, whose momentum was already slowing from political pressures, was severely under funded during World War II, with most of its economic programs being eliminated completely.

The Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederation were quick to act against the Axis politically. On June 12th, 1942, “tribal braves” representing the six nations of Iroquois, denoted as the “New World’s oldest democracy” by the New York Times, declared war against the Axis Powers. The war resolution read, “It is the sentiment of this council that the Six Nations of Indians declare that a state of war exists between our Confederacy of Six Nations on the one part and Germany, Italy, Japan and their allies against whom the United States has declared war, on the other part.” The resolution cited “the atrocities of the Axis nations” particularly “this merciless slaughter of mankind upon the part of these enemies of free peoples” as justification for engaging in war. This was not the first time the Iroquois had joined the United States in declaring an act of war; in 1917, the Iroquois Confederation had declared war against Germany.108

Collier proclaimed the war decree of the Iroquois to be a victory of tribal governmental organization, a product of the New Deal. In a press release, Collier championed the action of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederation and interpreted the event as the product of the Indian New Deal: “they are simply giving full expression, in their democratic traditions, to a supreme cause which has upset the internal affairs of the various members of the historic Confederacy.”109

108 “Chiefs of Iroquois Tribes Vote to Join War; Call on Six Nations Fight Against the Axis” in the New York Times, June 13, 1942.
Collier proclaimed the war decree as evidence that the American Indians did not approbate to German propaganda that declared Indians’ minority rights had been trampled by the United States Government. In reality, the war declaration was a heavily orchestrated event, with the media and the Bureau of Indian affairs in collaboration. The event was used in the American propaganda effort. The event was meant to foil extensive reporting that had covered Iroquois resistance to the political draft, which occurred continuously throughout the war. The service of American Indians in the war effort created a warped perception of American Indians. In World War II, American Indians were seen and denoted for

---

111 Ibid, 7-9.
112 Many young men of the Mohawk and Seneca tribes of New York State refused to sign up for the Selective Service during World War II. The tribes argued that they were not sovereign citizens to the United States, but rather only to their tribal nation.
fighting bravely next to other white Americans. As a result of their bravery a liberal argument was formed that asked “Why should Indians, who fought so bravely and side by side with the white man against Hitler and Tojo, now return to the terrible poverty of segregated reservations?” Many Americans likened the concentration camps of the Nazis to the American Indian reservations. The Bureau of Indian Affairs public image continued to spiral downwards, and many Americans saw the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a despotic institution that American Indians needed to be liberated from. The new catchwords created as the result of Indian participation now became “emancipation, federal withdrawal, relocation, and termination.”

Without government supported programs, American Indian reservations would retort back to their original economic conditions. Collier was frightfully aware of this tragic thought. However, as the War took precedent in funding and as the idea of termination of Indian tribes became popular in Washington, Commissioner Collier realized the Indian New Deal and his own tenure had come to a conclusion. Collier had lost the support of his own political party, and his political opponents on both sides of the aisle attacked his policies. Collier had watched as total Indian Service appropriation under Senator Wheeler, which had climaxed in 1939 to 46 million dollars; fall to an allocation of 28 million dollars in 1944, equaling the funding during the years of the Hoover Administration.

Disillusioned with politics, and shaken by the government’s action of interning Japanese American citizens, Collier moved to resign his post as Commissioner in

---

February of 1945. “Despite reports of pressure which some Congressional sources say is responsible for Collier’s resignation,” reported the *New York Times*, “Interior Department spokesmen insisted that the commissioner was giving up his Federal posts because of the limitations it put on his Indian Interests.”

After hearing the news of Collier’s resignation, an ailing President Roosevelt made no move to retain Collier as commissioner. Instead in a heart felt letter he praised Collier’s efforts:

> “If the Indians generally have come to possess greater self-respect and a stronger feeling of solidarity as members of the political state to which they belong, it is because, as Commissioner, you have really believed in the Sermon on the Mount, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution, and have done what you have to make these symbols by which to live.”

Collier had served the position of Commissioner of Indian Affairs for twelve years, the longest term ever served in the office. Looking forward in life, Collier declared the primary reason for his resignation in his memoirs: “Finally, the time had come to write in books the philosophy and experience of and with the United States Indians and Hemispheric Indians; and this writing could not be done within the rush of the Indian Commission.” Yet later in his memoir he sadly reminisced as he watched New Deal policy overturned by War time politicians who would later rise to power under President Truman. “President Roosevelt was gone. Harold Ickes resigned from

---

116 Letter from President Roosevelt to John Collier, January 22, 1945, *Zenith*, 304-305.
117 John Collier, *Zenith* 305.
government service, as did others of the foremost New Dealers... The New Deal had ended.”

**Final Remarks**

Often ideas work much better in theory then in actually, an inherent truth of the Indian Reorganization Act. In theory the Indian Reorganization Act provided remedies to all the ills that had befall the American Indian; land allotment, loss of culture and tribal practices, and economic poverty. In reality, the Indian Reorganization Act did not work as initially intended, largely because it was not properly funded, suffered derailment by political opposition, and because his notion of tribalism was not concurrent to the ethos of some American Indian tribes. Despite the limited effectiveness of some of the Indian Reorganization Act’s economic and land efforts; the tenure of John Collier’s post as Commissioner of Indian Affairs brought a new philosophy to the Federal Government’s relationship with the Indian tribes.

President Roosevelt final appraisal of Collier’s work enraptured the new ethos that Collier had brought to Bureau of Indian Affairs. For the first time in her history the United State’s government had acted honestly and ethically toward the American Indian:

“During the last twelve years, more than ever before, we have tried to impress upon the Indians that we are indeed Christians; that we not only avow but practice the qualities of freedom and liberty and opportunity that are explicit in our institutions. We have come to treat the Indian as a human being, as one who possesses the dignity and commands the respect of fellow human beings. In encouraging him to pursue his own life and revive and continue his own culture, we have added to his worth and dignity. We have opened the window of his mind to the extent that we have had money with which to do it. We have

---

118 Ibid. 307
improved his medical service, we have enlarged his intellectual program. We have protected him in his religion and we have added greatly to his political stature. All of these things have been done under leadership because of your wisdom and courage.”

--President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to John Collier, January 22, 1945. 119

In his memoirs, John Collier recollected his opinion on the significance of the Indian Reorganization Act. Collier believed that political reorganization had mobilized Indian tribes to act communally and had conditioned them to fight off the threat of political termination that lurked over them in the following decade: “I believe, how it was that, in the seven years after 1950, the hundreds of tribes withstood an implacable, resourceful assault by successive administrations and Congresses against their Indian values.” 120

In judging the significance of the Indian Reorganization Act on the Wisconsin Oneidas, this paper endorses Collier’s own assessment of his creation. More then providing economic opportunity to a downtrodden people, the Indian Reorganization Act, reorganized the societal structure of the Oneida Indian tribe. Through relocation, allotment, and contact with European civilizations, the Oneida had lost the communal bonds that had been inherent in their history for centuries. With the revival of the Indian tribe, now as a formal institution, once again the Oneida Indians could cooperate together in dictating their own future.

The success of the reorganization of the Oneida Indians is evident. The War Resolution against the Axis powers of 1942 indicates that the Oneida Indians had

119 Letter from President Roosevelt to John Collier, January 22, 1945.
120 John Collier, Zenith, 300.
effectively mobilized politically through the auspices of the tribe to formulate their own political opinion. With the shifting opinion of Indian reservations in the 1950s, tribal termination presented a real threat to the existence of the Oneida Indian tribe of Wisconsin. The mere existence of the Wisconsin Oneida as a tribe, reinforce the influence that the Indian Reorganization Act had on the Wisconsin Oneida Indians.

Today the Oneida tribe of Wisconsin is a well organized political entity. The tribe maintains a profitable casino and offers many social programs funded by gaming profits. As a result of their financial clout, the Oneida tribe plays a prominent role in politics of Northeast Wisconsin. Without the Indian Reorganization Act, the Oneidas of Wisconsin could not have mobilized politically. If the Oneidas had failed to politically organize, their economic and cultural success of today may have never been realized.

Pictured below is a photograph of the current elected officials of the Oneida tribal government and members of Oneida Business Committee. The current chair of the Oneida Indian tribe is Gerald Danforth, pictured second from the right in the first row. Danforth was elected to the position of chairman in 2005. This is second term of service as service in the position, his first term occurred from 1999-2002. The vice chairwomen of the Oneida Indian tribe is Kathy Hughes pictured to the left of Gerald Danforth. Tribal Secretary Patty Holt, pictured on the far right in the front row, and Treasurer Mercie Danforth pictured on the far left of the front row, round out the currently elected officials of the Wisconsin Oneida’s tribal government.
Today the goals of the Oneida Indian tribe remain much the same as they did at the onset of the Indian Reorganization Act. Chairman Gerald Danforth has set priorities for the Oneida Indian tribe. Danforth hopes to initiate growth in Indian gaming revenues, a continued diversification economically of the Oneida reservation, to preserve the Oneida Indian language, and to improve health care and education services to members of the tribe.  

The Indian Reorganization act failed to accomplish many of the goals it sought to achieve immediately. Yet, the results of the Indian Reorganization Act in 2007 have produced astounding results for the Wisconsin Oneidas. As a result of John Collier’s Indian Reorganization Act, American Indians now dictate their own futures rather than being dependent on the policies of government bureaucrats. Using the current status of

---

the Wisconsin Oneida Indians in 2007 as a benchmark, it seems the Indian
Reorganization Act was very successful in revitalizing the Wisconsin Oneida Indian tribe
both socially and economically. Truly, the Wisconsin Oneidas at the Hayward Indian
Congress were correct to hail Collier “the Abraham Lincoln of the Indians.”
Sources Consulted

Primary Sources


*Congressional Record*. 73 Congress, 1st Session, 1933.

_______. 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, 1934.


*Indians at Work*, July-August-September 1942.

_______. July-August 1943.

_______. May-June 1943.


_______. *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1933-1938*.


_______. *Oneida, Wisconsin Annual Report 1919*, August 18, 1918.


_______. *Testimony Taken at Rapid City, South Dakota*. March 2, 1934.


*The Indian Reorganization Act*, (PUBLIC--NO.383--73D Congress S. 3645) June 18, 1934

*The Wisconsin Magazine*, January 1929.

_______, February 1929.

*Time Magazine*, Monday June 25th, 1934.

*Treaty with the Oneida*, February 3, 1834, 7 Stat. 566.

Newspapers

*Ashland Daily Press*, April 34, 1934.


Websites

Secondary Sources


Downes, Randolph, C. “A Crusade for Indian Reform, 1922-1934.” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 32.3 December, 1945. 331-345


Appendix

Appendix A
Oneida Resolution Delivered at Hayward, WI, March April 24, 1934

“The Oneida Indians of the Oneida Indian Reservation, in Wisconsin, assembled in Council at the Parish Hall, Oneida, Wisconsin, March 14, 1934, determined:

Through their chiefs to express our appreciation to the President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, through our new Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Honorable John Collier.

That we, the Oneida Indians, have felt the spirit of the new deal in the administration of the affairs of the people of the entire country as being carried out as intended.

That we will forever be thankful to you as the new Commissioner of Indian affairs, as the tried and true friend of the Indians, which they have sorely been in need of for a century. We have known for many years that you were studying and fighting hard to bring about a betterment of the conditions of the Indians throughout the country. And we are hoping and struggling with you so that you will realize our desires.

We know it to be a fact that it was you who was instrumental in having the Indians to be included in the Emergency Relief and Civil Works Programs, which we have received this winter was surely appreciated by the Oneidas, which relief has never before been accorded to us.

We believe the best time to encourage a fighter to win, is when he is in the midst of a battle. And we are with you, as Oneida Indians, in your struggled by giving publicity to have congress pass the Indian Rights Bill, which you were instrumental in getting introduced. And should it become a law and a reality, we are sure that, what Abraham Lincoln was to the colored people, you are going to be the Abraham Lincoln to the Indians.

We understand the aims and substance of the Indian Rights Bill to be as follows:

1. Due to the destitution of Indians in general, brought about by the General Allotment Act of 1887.
2. That it is the intention of the new administration to have the Government re-assert its obligations and safeguard the Indians from extinction, and their properties.
3. To stop the divesting of the lands from the Indians.
4. To provide lands for those Indians that have become landless so that they again can have homes.
5. Extended trust periods not to expire as intended.
6. No more lands to be allotted to individual Indians.
7. No more taxation of Indian lands.
8. Indians nevermore to have their right to sell or mortgage heir lands.
9. Education of Indians as lawyers doctors, nurses, teachers, clerks, engineers, and other professions at the leading universities, colleges and schools.
10. Provide facilities for reforestation, grazing and farming of Indian lands.
11. Transfer authority over to the Indians from the Secretary of the Interior and Commissioner of Indian affairs, to the Indians for self-determination concerning their tribal affairs.

12. United States to provide funds and assistance to Indians in building up self-government again.

13. Secretary of Interior to issue charter providing the essentials of self-government, that of liberty of conscience, worship speech and free speech.

14. United States to build highways, bridges and local churches.

15. Courts to be established for civil and criminal cases.

16. Lawyers to be provided for Indians at all times.

17. Relieve Indians in distress.

18. Indians at liberty to abandon Indian community at any time.

The above proclamation approved unanimously by the five hundred Oneida Indians assembled in council. Signed March 17, 1934:

Wm. Skenanadore, Presiding Chief Oneida Indians
Chief Richard Sannor
Chief Hipon John
Chief Nelson Skenandoah
Chief William Cornelius
Appendix B
Letter from President Roosevelt to John Collier, January 22, 1945

My dear Commissioner Collier:

I cannot let you go, however, without saying that you have done an outstanding job in one of the most important and difficult offices in the Federal Government. One achievement of my administration in which I shall always take the deepest pride has been the progress that has been made in connection with our first Americans. I hope that the selfish exploitation of the Indians is now definitely a thing of the past over which we may be permitted to draw a veil of silence.

During the last twelve years, more than ever before, we have tried to impress upon the Indians that we are indeed Christians; that we not only avow but practice the qualities of freedom and liberty and opportunity that are explicit in our institutions. We have come to treat the Indian as a human being, as one who possesses the dignity and commands the respect of fellow human beings. In encouraging him to pursue his own life and revive and continue his own culture, we have added to his worth and dignity. We have opened the window of his mind to the extent that we have had money with which to do it. We have improved his medical service, we have enlarged his intellectual program. We have protected him in his religion and we have added greatly to his political stature.

All of these things have been done under leadership because of your wisdom and courage. It has not been an easy task and you might have been subject to far less criticism than had been yours if you had been content merely to mark time within the limits that custom had built up in periods when the feeling was that we should not do too much for the Indians but rather as little as possible. If the Indians generally have come to possess greater self-respect and a stronger feeling of solidarity as members of the political state to which they belong, it is because, as Commissioner, you have really believed in the Sermon on the Mount, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution, and have done what you have to make these symbols by which to live.

Your contribution to the progress and welfare of the American Indians will never be forgotten. Your services as an important member of this administration since 1922 will be an inspiration to those who follow you. You have my warmest congratulations upon a task well done and my hope that, in the future as in the past, even before you became a member of the administration, you will continue to achieve lasting benefits for the descendants of those misunderstood and misused human beings who originally possessed this great land of ours and who were displaced involuntarily, all too often with a selfish disregard of their right to live their own lives in their own way.

Sincerely yours,

(signed) Franklin D. Roosevelt
Appendix C
WPA Writer’s Project: Fish Story

Nikatsyanakla’ne
Fish Story

Yoká:te wa’kanuhtunyu’kó ka’i ká wakukwetshulú ni tsí? kós
Quite often, I think about these spring days, it used
nikatsyanakla’ne wahunihas’nu tsutakahá:wí tahnú yah kwí
to be fish were so plentiful long ago in those days and it was
unheard of someone to forbid us about our fishing. They
tehonatana’?keláshún, lohtstahokú’ká tsí? nikahá:wí nale? tikatsyanaklé? tsí?
always have an idea, the old timers, about the time again it is fishing time
at their old fishing place at that time. Just then, they will start croaking
and spring trout and frogs. At that time again, really
thatisya’kwathákwe? Emesnehká wi’nu nihatitsya’kwathákwe? tho nu
plentiful fish where Amos’s place is, where their old fishing place was at that
tshikla’wí loitiwya’rastahnítu’ne ayesya’ko ka’i ká
time. They were very ambitious about fishing, these

yukhstahokú’ká Kwah ok thiyoká:te? shakotíha’wi’sé laotinakwá:shú.
our deceased grandparents. It was quite often they brought along their spouses.

Kwah kís kwahstsutáíi tho tyonanistye? aatsykta ne’n kunu’kwé.
It was all night there they fried fish near the river bank the women.

Kwah uni kís tsí’ok nu nyonateka’tání ne wi’na othákhe? né
It even was here and there they had a fire going, you see some of them had
yotiínekaklí’tsúni ka’i ká tsyonyahái yó onú’tsí? kátió’ka na’teká:lu nale?
had a pot of soup on these sucker heads. Every so often again
sahutekú’ni alc? kás yah oksá? Thutaháshnawanhá:lané? ká’tho tsí?
they would eat again, sometimes not right away would they get busy here not
niyóle tayolhá:úbátye? ok yah kwí thahutuhkáyáykhe? yah uní thahatsi’wiitoske’
until towards morning they don’t even get hungry they didn’t get hungry
alu’hátí kwa’hátsutáíi? laitsya’kwa. Yokká:te? tho na’nikatsyanakláné,
early if all night they have been fishing. Quite often the fish would get so plentiful
kwah ok thycha’kotíy:’nas kwah tsí? nihotitsanííha. Kana’tekalá ke
with their hands, they grabbed the fish as fast as they could. On the river bank
yehonastyá:gh. Astáchtí? na kwi aseshakotíya’tanyú’ú othákhe? se
they tossed the fish. In the morning now then they will hitch up, some of them