

Historical Notes on the League of Indian Nations

There is an unbroken chain connecting the Iroquois Confederacy (as the French called them) or the League of Five Nations (as the British called them, later League of Six Nations) and the international activity of indigenous people in the 21st Century. The chain really consists of two interrelated but independent movements – the League of Indian Nations, and the League of Indians of Canada. These too have been continued on in other forms and with other names, but the historical thread is strong.

The League of Indian Nations can best be told through Deskaheh, whose story is at <http://tuscaroras.com/IDLA/pages/deskaheh.html> – note the term “Indian Defense League of America” seemed to come in with Clinton Rickard – but the tie with Deskaheh and the League of Indian Nations is clear.

You will note a reference in the above article to George Decker. He was a prominent Rochester, N.Y., lawyer who spent a great deal of time to assist Deskaheh. A website re Decker is at http://library.sjfc.edu/decker_papers.htm



Photograph of George P. Decker (left) and speaker of the Six Nations Council, Deskaheh (Levi General). The photograph was taken in July 1923.

The Indian Defense League came to focus on the border crossing issues and still today, sponsor an annual crossing, in both directions, where thousands of Indians, mostly Iroquois, every July 4 march across the bridge, have speeches in a park, and march back again, all totally ignoring Customs and Immigration officials. See <http://tuscaroras.com/IDLA/>

The League of Indian Nations was one of the principal reasons for the passage into law of the 1927 amendment to the *Indian Act* which prohibited the collection or payment of moneys to advance Indian claims. There might be something in *Hansard* relating to the passage of the amendment to provide a link with the League.

For an extensive historical examination of Deskaheh and the League, see the Master's Thesis by Li Xiu Woo at the University of Montreal, based on archival documents of the League itself, Canada, and the Netherlands. A table of contents of the thesis is at http://www.llm.uqam.ca/memoires/Li_Xiu_Woo.htm The author's resume of the thesis states

In 1923 the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, otherwise known as the Iroquois Six Nations, applied for membership in the League of Nations complaining that Canada had violated their right to independence. The following year Canada imposed a council elected under the Canadian Indian Act displacing the Six Nation Nations complaining that Canada had violated their right to independence. Since that time claims to indigenous sovereignty have been excluded from international fora, yet to this day the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council continues to meet, the Iroquois continue to seek international support and the majority of the Six Nations people refuse to participate in Canadian elections.

This story is little known to the general public, however, Deskaheh, the Royaner or Chief who represented the Six Nations in Geneva, is a hero to Canada's First Nations. Using copies of archival documents from the League of Nations, Canada and the Netherlands this paper reconstructs the events leading up to the League of Nations application and recounts the consequences. The Six Nations claimed their situation was unique. They had moved north to a territory along the Grand River following the American Revolution because of Britain's promise that they would be compensated for any losses suffered because of their military alliance. Their attempt to obtain a neutral adjudication of their status was supported at various times by the Netherlands, Persia, Ireland, Estonia and Panama, yet their case was never heard. Canada's Department of Indian Affairs was able to control Canadian policy regarding the Haudenosaunee complaint during the reformulation of international law that followed World War I. Paradoxically, at the very same time that the Six Nations were being deprived of the right to autonomous self-government at the local level, Canada was gaining international recognition for its independence from the British Empire.

What Canada and the Six Nations were seeking in the 1920's was almost identical. Both wanted the right to govern themselves according to local laws and customs and both struggled to maintain what they saw as the status quo. They found themselves pitted against each other because their presumptions concerning the rules governing their relationship differed. The Haudenosaunee who saw themselves as allies, not subjects of Britain, interpreted the Covenant of the League of Nations as a restatement of ancient accords symbolized by the Two Row Wampum and the Covenant Chain. Their egalitarian presumptions conflicted with the hierarchical values of the British Empire. Canadians believed the Six Nations were British subjects and wards of the Crown with an obligation to obey the laws passed by Canada's parliament, including the Indian Act. They thought Six Nations independence would violate Canada's territorial integrity, while the Six Nations complained that Canada was denying them free use of the little land that was left

to them following years of equivocation and mismanagement by colonial officials. How these events are interpreted will depend on the analytical framework chosen. This paper sets out the facts as a basis for future analysis.

The historical thread from the original Iroquois Confederacy to Deskaheh to the League of Nations to the Indian Defense League to the work of Mad Bear Anderson and the current strong involvement of the Iroquois in United Nations activities, principally through the UN Human Rights Committee related to a Convention on Rights of Indigenous People and the recent formation of a Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples is captured in the article at <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/8366/indian4.html> .

In 1977, the Iroquois delivered “A Basic Call To Consciousness” at a meeting of non-government organizations in Geneva, Switzerland <http://cs.fdl.cc.mn.us/natnet/c2c2.html> , <http://cs.fdl.cc.mn.us/natnet/c2c3.html> , and <http://cs.fdl.cc.mn.us/natnet/c2c4.html> . Involved in this presentation was Onondaga faithkeeper Oren Lyons, mentioned in the above article. It was Lyons who in 1993 addressed the United Nations General Assembly on behalf of all of North America's indigenous people as 1993 as named “Year of Indigenous People”, opening up the “Decade of Indigenous People”.

The “Last Speech of Deskaheh” remains a classic still today.

THE LAST SPEECH OF DESKAHEH

On the evening of March 10, 1925, suffering from a serious attack of pleurisy and pneumonia, he made his last speech. It was before a radio microphone in Rochester. Once more, and more forcefully than ever, he hurled defiance at big nations who disregard the claims of smaller peoples.

Nearly everyone who is listening to me is a pale face, I suppose. I am not. My skin is not red but that is what my people are called by others. My skin is brown, light brown, but our cheeks have a little flush and that is why we are called red skins. We don't mind that. There is no difference between us, under the skins, that any expert with a carving knife has ever discovered.

My home is on the Grand River. Until we sold off a large part, our country extended down to Lake Erie, where, 140 winters ago, we had a little sea-shore of our own and a birch-bark navy.

You would call it Canada. We do not. We call the little ten-miles square we have left the "Grand River Country." We have the right to do that. It is ours. We have the written pledge of George III that we should have it forever as against him or his successors and he promised to protect us in it.

We didn't think we would ever live long enough to find that a British promise was not good. An enemy's foot is on our country, and George V knows it for I told him so, but he will not lift his finger to protect us nor will any of his ministers.

One who would take away our rights is, of course, our enemy.

Do you think that any government should stop to consider whether any selfish end is to be gained or lost in the keeping of its word?

In some respects, we are just like you. We like to tell our troubles. You do that. You told us you were in great trouble a few winters ago because a great big giant with a big stick was after you. We helped you whip him. Many of our young men volunteered and many gave their lives for you. You were very willing to let them fight in the front ranks in France. Now we want to tell our troubles to you.

I do not mean that we are calling on your governments -- we are tired of calling on the governments of pale-faced peoples in America and in Europe. We have tried that and found it was no use. They deal only in fine words -- we want something more than that. We want justice from now on. After all that has happened to us, that is not much for us to ask. You got half of your territory here by warfare upon redmen, usually unprovoked, and you got about a quarter of it by bribing their chiefs, and not over a quarter of it did you get openly and fairly. You might have gotten a good share of it by fair means if you had tried.

You young people of the United States may not believe what I am saying. Do not take my word, but read your history. A good deal of true history about that has got into print now. We have a little territory left -- just enough to live and die on. Don't you think your governments ought to be ashamed to take that away from us by pretending it is part of theirs?

You ought to be ashamed if you let them. Before it is all gone, we mean to let you know what your governments are doing. If you are a free people you can have your own way. The governments at Washington and Ottawa have a silent partnership of policy. It is aimed to break up every tribe of Redmen so as to dominate every acre of their territory. Your high officials are the nomads today -- not the Red People. Your officials won't stay home.

Over in Ottawa, they call that policy "Indian Advancement". Over in Washington, they call it "Assimilation." We who would be the helpless victims say it is tyranny.

If this must go on to the bitter end, we would rather that you come with your guns and poison gases and get rid of us that way. Do it openly and above board. Do away with the pretense that you have the right to subjugate us to your will. Your governments do that by enforcing your alien laws upon us. That is an underhanded way. They can subjugate us if they will through the use of your law courts. But how would you like to be dragged down to Mexico, to be tried by Mexicans and jailed under Mexican law for what you did at home?

We want none of your laws and customs that we have not willingly adopted for ourselves. We have adopted many. You have adopted some of ours -- votes for women, for instance. We are as well behaved as you and you would think so if you knew us better.

We would be happier today, if left alone, than you who call yourselves Canadians and Americans. We have no jails and do not need them. You have many jails, but do they hold all the criminals you convict? And do you convict or prosecute all your violators of the thousands of laws you have?

Your governments have lately resorted to new practices in their Indian policies. In the old days, they often bribed our chiefs to sign treaties to get our lands. Now they know that our remaining territory can easily be gotten from us by first taking our political rights away in forcing us into your citizenship, so they give jobs in their Indian offices to the bright young people among us who will take them and who, to earn their pay, say that our people wish to become citizens with you and that we are ready to do it. But that is not true.

Your governments of today learned that method from the British. The British have long practiced it on weaker peoples in carrying out their policy of subjugating the world, if they can, to British Imperialism. Under cover of it, your lawmakers now assume to govern other peoples too weak to resist your courts. There is no three-mile limits or twelve-mile limits to strong governments who wish to do that.

About three winters ago, the Canadian Government set out to take mortgages on farms of our returned soldiers to secure loans made to them intending to use Canadian courts to enforce these mortgages in the name of Canadian authority within our country. When Ottawa tried that, our people resented it. We knew that would mean the end of our government. Because we did so, the Canadian Government began to enforce all sorts of Dominion and Provincial laws over us and quartered armed men among us to enforce Canadian laws and customs upon us. We appealed to Ottawa in the name of our right as a separate people and by right of our treaties, and the door was closed in our faces. We then went to London with our treaty and asked for the protection it promised and got no attention. Then we went to the League of Nations at Geneva with its covenant to protect little peoples and to enforce respect for treaties by its members and we spent a whole year patiently waiting but got no hearing.

To punish us for trying to preserve our rights, the Canadian Government has now pretended to abolish our government by Royal Proclamation, and has pretended to set up a Canadian made government over us, composed of the few traitors among us who are willing to accept pay from Ottawa and do its bidding. Finally, Ottawa officials, under pretense of a friendly visit, asked to inspect our precious wampum belts, made by our Fathers centuries ago as records of our history, and when shown to them, these false-faced officials seized and carried away those belts as bandits take away your precious belongings. The only difference was that our aged wampum-keeper did not put up his hands -- our hands go up only when we address the Great Spirit. Yours go up, I hear, only when some one of you is going through the pockets of his own white brother. According to your newspapers, they are up now a good deal of the time.

The Ottawa government thought that with no wampum belts to read in the opening of our Six Nations Councils, we would give up our home rule and self-government, the victims of superstition. Any superstition of which the Grand River People have been victims are not in reverence for wampum belts, but in their trust in the honor of governments who boast of a higher civilization.

We entrusted the British, long ago, with large sums of our money to care for when we ceded back parts of their territory. They took \$140,000 of that money seventy-five winters ago to use for their own selfish ends, and we have never been able to get it back.

Your Government of the United States, I hear, has just decided to take away the political liberties of all the redmen you promised to protect forever, by passing such a law through your Congress in defiance of the Treaties made by George Washington. That law, of course, would mean the breaking up of the tribes if enforced. Our people would rather be deprived of their money than their political liberties -- so would you.

I suppose some of you never heard of my people before and that many of you, if you ever did, supposed that we were all long gone to our Happy Hunting Grounds. NO!! There are as many of us as there were a thousand winters ago. There are more of us than there used to be and that makes a great difference in the respect we get from your governments.

I ask you a question or two. Do not hurry with your answers. Do you believe -- really believe -- that all peoples are entitled to equal protection of international law now that you are so strong? Do you believe -- really believe -- that treaty pledges should be kept? Think these questions over and answer them to yourselves.

We are not as dependent in some ways as we were in the early days. We do not need interpreters now. We know your language and can understand your words for ourselves and we have learned to decide for ourselves what is good for us. It is bad for any people to take the advice of an alien people as to that.

You Mothers, I hear, have a good deal to say about your government. Our Mothers have always had a hand in ours. Maybe you can do something to help us now. If you white mothers are hard-hearted and will not, perhaps you boys and girls who are listening and who have loved to read stories about our people -- the true ones, I mean -- will help us when you grow up if there are any of us left then to be helped.

If you are bound to treat us as though we were citizens under your government, then those of your people who are land-hungry will get our farms away from us by hooks and crooks under your property laws and in your courts that we do not understand and do not wish to learn. We would then be homeless and have to drift into your big cities to work for wages, to buy bread, and have to pay rent, as you call it, to live on this earth and to live in little rooms in which we would suffocate. We would then be scattered and lost to each other and lost among so many of you. Our boys and girls would then have to intermarry with you, or not at all. If consumption (tuberculosis) took us off or if we brought no children into the world, or our children mixed with the ocean of your blood, then there would be no Iroquois left.

So boys and girls, if you grow up and claim the right to live together and govern yourselves – and you ought to -- and if you do not concede the same right to other peoples -- and you will be strong enough to have your own way -- you will be tyrants, won't you? If you do not like that word, use a better one, if you can find one, but don't deceive yourselves by the word you use.

Boys, you respect your fathers because they are members of a free people and have a voice in the government over them and because they helped to make it and made it for themselves and will hand it down to you. If you knew that your fathers had nothing to do with the government they are under, but were mere subjects of other men's wills, you could not look up to them and they could not look you in the face. They would not be real men then. Neither would we.

The Fathers among our people our people have been real men. They cry out now against the injustice of being treated as something else and being called incompetents who must be governed by another people -- which means the people who think that way about them.

Boys -- think this over. Do it before your minds lose the power to grasp the idea that there are other peoples in this world beside your own and with an equal right to be here. You see that a people as strong as yours is a great danger to other peoples near you. Already your will comes pretty near to being law in this world where no one can whip you. Think then what it will mean if you grow up with a will to be unjust to other peoples, to believe that whatever your government does to other peoples is no crime, however wicked. I hope the Irish Americans hear that and will think about it -- they used to when that shoe pinched their foot.

This is the story of the Mohawks, the story of the Oneidas, of the Cayugas -- I am a Cayuga, of the Onondagas, the Senecas, and the Tuscaroras. They are the Iroquois. Tell it to those who have not been listening. Maybe I will be stopped from telling it. But if I am prevented from telling it over, as I hope to do, the story will not be lost. I have already told it to thousands of listeners in Europe -- it has gone into the records where your children can find it when I may be dead or be in jail for daring to tell the truth. I have told this story in Switzerland -- they have free speech in little Switzerland. One can tell the truth over there in public, even if it is uncomfortable for some great people.

This story comes straight from Deskaheh, one of the chiefs of the Cayugas. I am the speaker of the Council of the Six Nations, the oldest League of Nations now existing. It was founded by Hiawatha. It is a League which is still alive and intends, as best it can, to defend the rights of the Iroquois to live under their own laws in their own little countries now left to them, to worship their Great Spirit in their own way, and to enjoy the rights which are as surely theirs as the white man's rights are his own.

If you think the Iroquois are being wronged, write letters from Canada to your ministers of Parliament, and from the United States to your Congressmen and tell them so. They will listen to you for you elect them. If they are against us, ask them to tell you when and how they got the right to govern people who have no part in your government and do not live in your country but live in their own. They can't tell you that.

One word more so that you will be sure to remember our people. If it had not been for them, you would not be here. If, one hundred and sixty-six winters ago, our warriors had not helped the British at Quebec, Quebec would not have fallen to the British. The French would then have driven your English-speaking forefathers out of this land, bag and baggage. Then it would have been a French-speaking people here today, not you. That part of your history cannot be blotted out by the stealing of our wampum belts in which that is recorded.

I could tell you much more about our people, and I may some other time, if you would like to have me.



Sick, fever-ridden, despairing, Deskaheh raised his voice to speak his last proud message.

The next morning, Deskaheh was in a Rochester hospital. Eight weeks later he knew he was dying, and asked to be taken back to Clinton Rickard's home on the Tuscarora Reservation.

While he made ready for his journey along the Milky Way to the Spirit World, his brother, wife and children tried to cross the border at Niagara Falls to be with him, and were refused permission to do so.

On June 27, 1925, alone and with his eyes set toward the Six Nations Land he had tried to serve, he died.

White Americans and white Canadians have done little to keep the story of Deskaheh alive. Few have seen the small stone that marks his grave in the burial grounds of the Cayuga Longhouse. Fewer still care to remember his words. They make the white man uncomfortable because they bear so emphatically on contemporary thinking about the native people, on proposed laws in the legislative bodies of the states and the nations that would still, despite their agreements to (in Deskaheh's words) "protect little peoples and to enforce respect for treaties," regard Indians as incompetents to be governed for their own good by wiser neighbors.



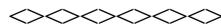
Mrs. Levi General, Deskaheh's widow, with Tehanetorens (Ray Fadden), founder of Six Nations Museum, at the memorial monument to Deskaheh at the Sour Springs Cayuga Longhouse, Grand River Country, Ohsweken. Photo Copyright © By Ray Tehanetorens Fadden & John Kahonhes Fadden – click and drag to enlarge so as to read inscription

But the Iroquois remember. And when they speak of Deskaheh, the white men who know his story grow troubled, wondering if they and their governments could by some unlikely chance have dealt unjustly with a great man.

Increasingly, Deskaheh is taking his place as an international icon of the sovereignty of indigenous nations. On May 10, 2004, Kofi Amman, Secretary-General of the United Nations, addressing the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, said,

“Just over 80 years ago, Haudenosaunee Chief Deskaheh travelled from Canada to Geneva to tell the League of Nations about the right of his people to live on their own land, follow their own laws and practise their own faiths. Chief Deskaheh was refused permission to speak and had to return home without accomplishing his mission. But his vision has inspired countless indigenous leaders since then to articulate and pursue the goals of their peoples. You – and we – have come a long way since then.”

18 months after Deskaheh died, Chief Clinton Rickard of the Tuscarora Nation founded the Indian Defense League of America on December 1, 1926, to resist further erosion of the Rights of Indians in North America and to guarantee unrestricted passage through the Canada / U.S. Border in North America for Indian People.



The League of Indians of Canada

After World War One, Canadian "Indians" were struggling to organize and assert themselves politically on the provincial and national levels. Indians who questioned their subservience to the federal Indian Act, however, were considered dangerous subversives by government officials in the 1920s and 1930s.

As historian James Dempsey notes, the veterans' exposure to the broader world had changed them profoundly, but they returned to the same patronizing, oppressive society that they had left behind. Although eligible for the vote overseas, they lost their democratic rights after the war. Furthermore, the inequitable eligibility requirements and dispensation of veterans' settlement packages (money and land), disadvantaged many Indian veterans. Although they had fought overseas, their legal status had not changed; they continued to be wards of the Crown. The veterans, armed with increased political awareness following their experiences at war, began to organize politically.¹

¹ L. James Dempsey, *Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War I* (Canadian Plains Studies 37, Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1999).

It was in this atmosphere that Frederick Ogilvy Loft (1867 - 1934), a Mohawk, returned from duty as an lieutenant in the Canadian Army in after World War I, finding many of the freedoms he had fought for were not extended to the people of the Six Nations.

Loft was born on the Six Nations Reserve at Grand River. He was trained as an accountant, and enlisted in the Canadian Army. He served overseas from June 1917 to February 1918.² Deskaheh, above, was a contemporary of Loft's, knew Loft, but as Speaker of the Council, Deskaheh was within the Six Nations government.

After returning from service, he went to London, England, to ask the British Privy Council for a hearing on behalf of Indians of Canada. He was told to organize his people before becoming a representative. So he worked out of his home to form an organization which was known as the League of Indians of Canada and as the North American League of Indians.

As an organizer, Loft travelled across Canada to unite Indians nationally through common concerns with the federal government Indian policies. Loft faced tremendous opposition from the federal government during these early organisational activities. Over the years, people attending these meeting were often charged by police for "violations" of the existing Pass laws.

In June 1920, a few thousand Indians met as the League of Indians of Canada, at Elphinstone, Manitoba. At this and other meetings, they compiled a list of concerns and requests to send to the Federal Government in Ottawa. The issues included better education; improvement in health programs; ownership of property and land (for example, the right to own your own cattle); treaty and hunting rights; the Indian Act; freedom to practise the Sundance and other ceremonies; and economic development. They were also protesting the Indian Affairs proposal to enfranchise returned Native soldiers (enfranchisement would mean they would lose their treaty status). As early as 1923 this league asked for provincial control of Indian education (instead of church-run residential schools) and asked for Indian representation on school boards.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples took note of Loft's organizing. . <http://www.indigenous.bc.ca/v1/Vol1Ch12s1tos3.asp> . "In 1918, a new Aboriginal political organization was envisioned. Although the League of Indians began in the east, with Loft as its first president, the intention to become national in scope was demonstrated at western conventions in Manitoba in 1920, Saskatchewan in 1921 and Alberta in 1922. Loft's initial plan had been to organize widely scattered bands for united collective action patterned after labour unions. He maintained that Indian peoples were facing the same problems and could only effect change by working together: "We must be heard as a nation."

² Cuthand, Stan; "The Native Peoples of the Prairie Provinces in the 1920s and 1930s"; in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations In Canada*; ed. J.R.Mliler; U of Toronto Press; c 1991

On September 2, 1919, the League of Indians of Canada held its first Congress with Lieutenant Loft emerging as president and secretary-treasurer. An historic call for unity was adopted, reading in part:

As peaceable and law-abiding citizens in the past and even in the late war, we have performed dutiful service to our King, Country and Empire, we have the right to claim and demand more justice and fair play as a recompense, for we, have fought for the sacred rights of justice, freedom and liberty so dear to mankind, no matter what their color or creed. The first aim of the League then is to claim and protect the rights of all Indians in Canada by legitimate and just means. Second, absolute control in retaining possession or disposing of our lands. That all questions and matters relating to individual and National well being of Indians shall rest with the people and their dealing with Government shall be by and through their respective Band Councils.



The League of Indians of Canada at Keeseekoowenin Reserve, 1920
<<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/keeseekoowenin/history/chiefs.html>>

In 1920, the League held its meeting at the Keeseekoowenin Reserve in Manitoba. There he proposed to bring a legal action to test the constitutionality of provincial game laws in the light of treaty hunting, fishing, and trapping rights. The reaction came swiftly from Indian Affairs. As the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People states, “Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent general, reacted with increasing animosity to the growth of Aboriginal political organization. Scott confided in a memorandum to Solicitor General Arthur Meighen: “It (compulsory enfranchisement) would also check the intrigues of smart Indians on the reserves,

who are forming organizations to foster these aboriginal feelings, and to thwart the efforts and policy of the Department." He gave Loft as an example: "Such a man should be enfranchised."³

Scott notified Loft that 'the Department is considering the question of your enfranchisement.'" In other words, he was to be declared a 'non-Indian', without his consent. The League of Indians and Loft personally was lobbying against Scott's new legislation to enfranchise returned First World War veterans. It was Scott's view that the the government should be able "to enfranchise individual Indians or bands of Indians without the necessity of obtaining their consent thereto."

Also, the Commission Report states, "Loft was attempting to get answers from Commissioner Graham, who was surveying western reserves and pursuing a policy of obtaining land surrenders. Scott ordered Graham not to confer with Loft at all, sent extra RCMP to all meetings of the League, and kept Loft himself under surveillance. When Loft then attempted to deal directly with members of Parliament, Scott tried to discredit him."⁴

The League of Indian Nations met in 1921 at Thunderchild, Saskatchewan. The platform was to create unity to battle against oppressive Indian Affairs policy, to promote religious freedom, and to regain the right to travel outside the reserve without passes, demanding that no further land surrenders be undertaken, that economic programs be instituted, and generally, that the spirit and terms of the treaties be honoured and respected.

John Tootoosis (b. 18 July 1899 - d. 1 Feb 1989), who became a vocal and well-respected elder, attended the Thunderchild meeting with his father, John Tootoosis Sr., of Poundmaker's Reserve. John Jr. was the grandson of Yellow Mud Blanket, the brother of Chief Poundmaker of Poundmaker reserve, who was hung by the Canadian Government after the Rebellion of 1883. The year before, John had been made chief of his band, but his authority was denied by Indian Affairs because he was just short of his 21st birthday.⁵

Tootoosis was very impressed with the leadership of Loft and it confirmed his belief that Indians would become more effective politically if they became united: "Those seeds that were placed in their heads by Mr. Loft were beginning to ripen. They saw that the only method was to sit together and talk in order to achieve anything." John Tootoosis would later reshape the picture of Saskatchewan Indian politics during its formative years.

³ Quoted in http://www.cwis.org/fwdp/Americas/unn_c-31.txt

⁴ See Brian E. Tittley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), p. 102-106.

⁵ *John Tootoosis*, by Jean Goodwill and Norma Sluman. Pemmican Books.

In 1922, the League met at Samson Reserve, Hobbema, Alberta where over 1,500 Blackfoot, Stony, Cree and Assiniboine delegates assembled.⁶ The Saddle Lake Reserve near St. Paul des Metis sponsored later conferences (1931-32) attended by 1,300 delegates.⁷

In 1929, Loft changed the organization into founded the League of Indians of Canada. In the 1930s, Loft continued to move through the area to urge further Indian political activity in the west. As the Royal Commission Report states, "For personal reasons Loft left the League for a few years. In this interval the IAB attempted to suppress further political activity. An amendment to the Indian Act made it illegal to raise funds 'for the prosecution of any claim.' The penalties for any organizer who persisted included fines and jail sentences. On his return, Loft was unable to revive the eastern branch of the League because of persecution by Scott.

When Loft tried to raise money to go to England in 1931 and legally challenge provincial game laws which violated the Indians' treaty promises, he was dismissed by Indian Affairs officials as one who "made a living exploiting Indians" (Titley, 1986:108).

In 1932, when the League wanted to stop Indian Affairs' amendments to policy, Ottawa officials rejected the demands out of hand with an ill-tempered reply. Other resolutions are also ignored by the Government.

Loft's example also had a strong influence on the political development of leadership within Saskatchewan and Alberta. Annual conferences were hosted alternately between Saskatchewan and Alberta bands under the revitalized League of Indians of Western Canada, whose first president was the Rev. Edward Ahenakew. Leadership in League activities continued in the hands of men like Tootoosis and Ahenakew, men conscious of the contributions Aboriginal people had made in the war and familiar with the controls exerted by Indian Affairs and the poverty, limited education and discrimination that results.

Indians in these two provinces formed an arm of the League of Indians of Canada called the League of Indians of Western Canada (LIWC). Joe Taylor of Onion Lake headed the Saskatchewan branch. In 1932, John Tootoosis Senior died and John Jr. was selected as his replacement as the representative from Poundmaker's Reserve to the League of Indians of Western Canada. Tootoosis worked with Joe Taylor, whom he had met at a Saddle Lake conference in 1932. The LIWC would later fracture when John Callihoo of Alberta and John Tootoosis would clash and Callihoo left to form a separate Alberta organisation.

⁶ Reverend Simpson Brigham, an Anglican priest from Walpole Island, Ontario, (although not present at the meeting) was elected Vice- President of the League of Indians of Canada. Henry Ford gave tractors and other farm machinery to Walpole Island. This equipment was put under the direction of Reverend Brigham. Ford also gave Reverend Brigham an automobile. <http://www.bkejwanong.com/history.htm>

⁷ <http://www.telusplanet.net/public/dgarneau/indian25.htm>

During the 1930's John worked for the League of Indians of Western Canada. He was elected secretary and organizer for the Prairie Region. He was subjected to threats and coercive tactics by the federal government during his own organisational activities in Saskatchewan. Indian Affairs tried to restrict his movements and ban him from reserves. He was threatened with excommunication from the Catholic church.

In 1936, John went to Ottawa representing the concerns of the LICW, to follow up on the briefs submitted to Indian Affairs. The League had received no response to the briefs over the four years they had been forwarded to the Department of Indian Affairs. John was determined to have their concerns considered by the Indian Affairs department and through this unfruitful mission he would gain valuable experience during this excursion to Ottawa. The department officials did however receive a taste of the tough stance that Tootoosis would use when dealing with non-Indian governments.

Loft died in 1934. Although he failed in his attempt to create a national force, this Mohawk man from the East succeeded in planting a hardy seed in the West. The western branches continued throughout the 1930s and often adopted Loft's example of circumventing Indian Affairs and calling upon members of Parliament for help. The level of activity in the western League illustrated that Indians "were not silent, passive observers of their destiny but rather actively struggling for a place as native people in Canada." Loft's organization laid the foundation for later political organizations such as the Indian Association of Alberta in 1939.

In 1946, two groups which had evolved from the League, the Protective Association and the Association of Saskatchewan Indians met to form the Union of Saskatchewan Indians. John Tootoosis served as its president. In 1959, they reorganized as the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians and John was elected as the first President of the Federation. As an elder in his 90s, Tootoosis was a strong advocate for international activities for the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians.

Peter Kulchyski, author of "A Considerable Unrest: F.O. Loft and the League of Indians", *Native Studies Review* 4/1-2 (1988), p. 107, calls Loft one of "the great Indian activists of the first half of the twentieth century, whose struggles laid the groundwork from which recent activism emerged". Today, F.O. Loft's son, Fred Loft Jr., is active with as a CUPE union leader in Hamilton, Ontario.

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