



Chief Waowawanaonk of the Iroquois (Peter Wilson)

(1761-1837)

Speech on the Empire State (1847)

INTRODUCTION

Chief Waowawanaonk (“They hear his voice”) gave this speech to the New York Historical Society in 1847. Indians called New York the Empire State.

SPEECH TO NEW YORKERS

You see before you an Iroquois; yes, a native American! You have heard the history of the Indian trails and the geography of the State of New York before it was known to the palefaces. The land of Ga-nun-no was once laced by these trails from Albany to Buffalo, trails that my people had trod for centuries—worn so deep by the feet of the Iroquois that they became your own roads of travel, when my people no longer walked in them. Your highways still lie in those paths; the same lines of communication bind one part of the Long House to another. My friend has told you that the Iroquois have no monuments. These highways are their monuments; this land of Ga-nun-no, this Empire State, is our monument. We wish to lay our bones under its soil, among those of our fathers. We shall not long occupy much room in living—still less when we are gone.

Have we, the first holders of this prosperous region, no longer a share in that history? Glad were your forefathers to sit down upon the threshold of the Long House. Rich did they then hold themselves in getting the mere sweepings from its door. Had our forefathers spurned you from it, when the French were thundering at the opposite end to cut a passage through and drive you into the sea, whatever has been the fate of other Indians, the Iroquois might still have been a nation; and I, too, might have had—a country!

There was a prophet of our race in early times who said that the day would come when troubles would fall upon the Indians so that they would knock their heads together. When that time came they were to search for a large palm-tree and shelter their heads beneath its shade, letting their bodies be buried at its roots, and cause that tree to flourish and become a fitting monument of the Iroquois race. That time has now come; we are in trouble and distress—we knock our heads together in agony, and we desire to find the

palm-tree that we may lie down and die beneath it. We wish that palm-tree to be the state of New York, that it may be the monument of the Iroquois.



Hiawatha, founder of Iroquois League