

## **Buffalo Creek**

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In the mid-18th century Buffalo Creek became a haven for communities living under the rafters of the Confederacy. Communities like the Tuscarora, Tutelo, Conoy, Munsee, and Nanticoke came from the upper Susquehanna region and the Chenango Valley. Both the Mohawk, influenced by Joseph Brant, on the Haldimand Patent along the Grand River in Lower Canada, and the Seneca in the Buffalo Creek area were simultaneously resurrecting the Confederacy. The Onondaga joined the Seneca after American General Goosen Van Shaiack destroyed ten towns in central New York during the infamous 1779 Sullivan-Clinton Campaign. Next, the Cayuga came when New York State used their territory as military bounty lands for payment of veterans after the American Revolution and after the “sales” of the Cayuga Reservation in 1795 and 1807. The Confederacy’s Council Fire was largely kept by Ut-ha-wah, Captain Cold, an Onondaga chief residing at Buffalo Creek. Immediately at the end of the war, Buffalo Creek became the ritual center of Hodinöhsö:ni’ ceremonialism.

Modern-day occupation of Seneca occurred after the American Revolution. In 1779, American Generals Sullivan and Clinton razed Senecas’ ancestral homes and food stores in the Genesee Valley in a scorched-earth campaign ordered by George Washington in 1779. The Seneca and other occupants living on Seneca lands retreated west to the safety of the British-held Fort Niagara. Quickly, the people spread south along the Niagara River to the Buffalo Creek area.

The Seneca shared Buffalo Creek with other Hodinöhsö:ni’ and Native nations after the American Revolution.

The terms of the 1797 Treaty of Big Tree reserved Buffalo Creek Territory as a rectangular plot of 128 square miles (83,557 acres). The area had been long occupied and considered spiritually and culturally important for the Seneca, the Erie, and their ancestors for thousands of years. The territory was well watered by Buffalo, Cayuga, and Cazenovia creeks as well as access to Lake Erie. Additionally, the multinational Seneca community was settled among a rich forest-covered wilderness that provided for the needs of numerous refugees of the American Revolution.

An early census of Buffalo Creek: In 1792, Timothy Pickering noted that 331 Senecas were at Buffalo Creek, along with 215 Onondagas and 22 Cayugas. By 1819, 686 Senecas, nearly 30 percent of all Senecas, resided at Buffalo Creek, while 365 were at Tonawanda, 389 at Cattaraugus, 456 on the Genesee Reservations, and 597 at Allegany.

In 1780, Seneca chief, Old Smoke, family, and his community relocated to Buffalo Creek and was first considered to be the first post-Revolution settlement. The oldest town, often referred to as the Seneca Village, was located at Seneca Street, Indian Church Road, and Buffam Street in what is today’s town of West Seneca. Seneca leaders Farmer’s Brother, Red Jacket, and Young King resided here. Soon after Old Smoke’s arrival eight additional clusters of Seneca population were noted on this reservation. In 1802, with the dispossession of the Seneca from Little Beard’s Territory along the Genesee River, aided in the creation of other settlements in the Buffalo Creek. For example, Jack Berry, a former resident from Little Beard’s Town, established the settlement of Jackstown and Chief Big Kettle’s followers established Turkeytown.

Prior to the War of 1812, the residents of Seneca Village constructed a log council house, about one hundred yards north of Little and Archer Streets in South Buffalo. By the 1820s, two mission

houses, a school, and a church were built in Seneca Village; the settlement was largely divided into two neighborhoods: the "Pagan Village" or *Red Jacket's Village*; and the "Christian Village" along Pollard's Road headed by Captain Pollard and later Seneca chiefs Young King and Seneca White.

Buffalo Creek served as a sanctuary for Natives escaping the horrors of war.

It had taken a few years, but the New York Missionary Society finally established a mission and school at Buffalo Creek. In 1811, Jabez Hyde, a teacher from the New York Missionary Society, established the first school at the Buffalo Creek Reservation. By 1817, the school grew to thirty students. Though promised not to pass Christianity onto young Seneca, Hyde - through a translator - taught students to write "simple discourses on parts of the Bible." Hyde was replaced in 1821 by Thompson S. Harris. Through his leadership the membership of the Seneca Mission Church grew to forty-six congregants by 1828, including two prominent Seneca Chiefs - Captain Pollard and Seneca White. He left his post in 1829.

In 1831, Asher Wright assumed the directorship of the Seneca Mission. He served the residents at Buffalo Creek until their removal to Cattaraugus in 1846 where he continued on until his death in 1875. His wife Laura conceived a writing system for the Seneca language, edited a Seneca language newspaper - The Mental Elevator - in the Seneca language, and published a number of publications in Seneca. Asher and Laura Wright served in a number of key roles for the Seneca Nation and prominent Seneca Nation citizens.

By 1820, a number of denominations had gained access to the territory. In 1821, the United Foreign Missionary Society sent a missionary to Buffalo Creek who set up a mission church and school that lasted until the 1840s removal from Buffalo Creek to Cattaraugus. In 1826 the United Foreign Missionary Society joined the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which came under the patronage of the Presbyterian Board of Missions.

On May 20<sup>th</sup> 1842, in what is to become West Seneca, served as the treaty grounds in which the Seneca and United States entered a federal accord returning the Allegany and Cattaraugus Territories to the Seneca people. For the return of these two communities back, the Seneca surrendered the Buffalo Creek territory. This area served as the Central Fire of the Hodinöhsö:ni' Grand Council until the 1840s.

In the years immediately after the loss of the Buffalo Creek lands, the Seneca and their guests dispersed across North America. Many Seneca went to Allegany and Cattaraugus territories, others went to Tonawanda where that community refused to surrender the territory in the 1838 Treaty at Buffalo Creek. They successfully won back their territory. The Seneca at Allegany and Cattaraugus broke away from the Chief and Clan mother system and created a democracy modeled on the U.S. system.