

# Indian name-giving ceremonies vary

OHSWEKEN — A couple of weeks ago, I received an Indian name at the Six Nations Pageant. It was given in the Cayuga language. The Cayuga Nation is one of the Six Iroquois Nations of the Grand River. The name I was given was Hah-yah-twa, which in English means "He Writes" or "The Writer."

I was pleased that they thought this was a suitable name for me. It indicated that they were satisfied with the script which I had written for this year's play. The actors too, had a lot of fun with the story of Tecumseh, this year's subject.

When I arrived at Wa-da-keh, the Forest Theatre, that evening, I did not know I was going to get an Indian name. Robert Jamieson, the pageant president, came up and asked me if I preferred a Mohawk name or a Cayuga name. Mr. Jamieson may be the only elder on the reserve who is fluent in both languages, as well as English. I decided on Cayuga because I had already been informally given a Mohawk name by the Mohawk language teachers. They called me "Kahia-tohkwah-tseri:io," which roughly translated means "Eloquent Pen". It was just a made-up name and there was no ceremony to make it official.

I had seen people, such as a superintendent of education, being given an Indian name at the fair but I hadn't paid much attention. I didn't

## Our Town

George  
Beaver



think I'd ever receive one. Now it was my turn and I didn't know what I was supposed to do.

After the play was over, Mr. Jamieson called me to the stage of the Forest Theatre. He then told the audience that he was conferring a Cayuga name on me and he told them what it meant. Then we shook hands and I figured it was over. He then called on Arnold General's Indian Dance Troupe. I wandered off and went backstage.

Soon a woman came up and asked: "Why aren't you dancing?" I thought she was joking, so I said that I didn't want to show off my skill. Actually, I don't have any skill at dancing. By the time the third person asked me the same thing, I began to wonder whether I had somehow messed up the ceremony. By then the dancers had left the stage and people were going home.

Luckily for me, Mr. Jamieson is an expert on Iroquois Indian ceremonies. What he told me later convinced me that I had not messed up the ceremony and so I now officially have a Cayuga name.

The name-giving ceremony as a public event is different than the one performed in the Longhouse. The Longhouse is sacred to the traditional people because it is their house of worship. In the ceremony performed in the Longhouse, the person having a name conferred on him has to dance back and forth three times with the other dancers. In a public name-giving ceremony, this is optional. I was relieved that the ceremony had not been spoiled and I still had my Cayuga name.

Now the next time someone asks me "are you the writer?" I can truthfully reply "that's my name. Hah-yah-twa."