

Meetings drew delegates from U.S.

OHSWEKEN — Several weeks ago, when writing about the drastic decline of native languages, I mentioned several Iroquoian Indian reserves here in Canada. As a boy growing up in the 1940s, I was more familiar with the Indian reservations in the U.S.

Every winter our local Baptist church held "special meetings." Delegates were welcomed from Indian churches in New York State. Cattaraugus, Tonawanda and Tuscarora reservations usually sent two delegates each. Cattaraugus and Tonawanda are Indian reservations, south and east of Buffalo, N.Y. The Tuscarora reservation is near Niagara Falls, N.Y.

The Indian delegates usually stayed with a local family for a week and assisted with daily visitations in the neighborhood. They were often old and serious men or women, who spent most of their time talking about religion. However, there were some exceptions. One jolly old gentleman was a widower and the older people good-naturedly accused him of coming to Six Nations to look over the crop of eligible old women. He would just laugh and wink.

Another time the delegates from one church were two young unmarried girls barely out of their teens. For some reason we had an unusually large number of young men attending the services that winter.

Our Town

George
Beaver



One Easter, a group of us from the Medina church went to the Tonawanda reservation near Akron, N.Y., for a sunrise service. We arrived on Saturday evening and were billeted in various Indian homes. The next morning, after the sunrise service, we were treated to a fine feast of bacon, ham, sausages and eggs. It reminded me of one of my father's favorite sayings. He often said "the only thing you have is what you eat." He meant that everything you have, such as clothes and money, can be taken away from you, but what you have eaten cannot be taken away.

These visits to and from Indian communities in the U.S. were very interesting. We often ran across relatives and friends that we had almost forgotten about.

There were four other Iroquoian reservations in the U.S. that we did not visit. They

were either too distant or perhaps they did not have a Baptist church there. They were Allegany, Onondaga, Cornplanter and Oneida. The Cornplanter reservation, named after a famous Seneca chief, is just over the Pennsylvania line south of Buffalo. Onondaga is near Syracuse, N.Y.

I passed by the Oneida reservation on a trip in 1984. It is well past Syracuse on the way to Utica, N.Y. It is not to be confused with the Oneida Indian Reserve near London. The Oneida people in these two Indian communities were separated from each other during the American Revolution more than 200 years ago.

These seven Indian reservations are all on land that belonged to the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy before the American Revolution. It is a curious fact that there are also seven Iroquoian reserves on the Canadian side of the border. One of them, Akwesasne, sits smack on the border to remind everyone that we natives were here long before borders were put up.