

Native pageant told it like it was 1989

OHSWEKEN — If you're one of those people who go to a play to have your ego stroked, this year's Six Nations Native Pageant would not have been for you. Many Canadians are as bad as Americans in this regard. They prefer their history to be sugar-coated with a bit of chocolate sprinkled on top. Real history is often somewhat bitter but, like medicine, hopefully it will make you better in the future.

This year's play, at the Forest Theatre on Sour Springs Road, was native history told from a native perspective. Some of the episodes depicted have never before been seen in print. They come from the oral history of the Six Nations. The play covers the troubled period after the Six Nations Iroquois were uprooted from their ancient tribal lands during the American Revolution, up to the present time.

It was called *The New Beginning* because after living prosperously for hundreds of years in the Finger Lakes Region and along the Mohawk River, the Six Nations had to leave their homeland and start anew in the wilds of southern Ontario. They left vast fields of corn, beans and squash, The Three Sisters. They left fruit orchards, villages and huge fortified buildings the European writ-



ers called castles. They came to a land barren of shelter from the elements and already depleted of fur-bearing animals. They were United Empire Loyalists as much as any Scot or Englishman but they have never been called that because they were natives. And they have rarely been treated as UELs.

One of the lesser-known episodes which occurred in the 1840s is depicted in this year's play. When white squatters began encroaching on Six Nations land by the Grand River, the Six Nations Council, which consisted of Chiefs of the Confederacy, appealed to the Canadian government to control their people. Agents were sent out to request the squatters to move but they demanded payment for the buildings, fences, etc., that they had put up. The government decided it

would be easier to move the Indians across the river. The squatters were only too happy to assist in this and there are stories passed down by word of mouth of the white squatters driving the Indians across the river with clubs and pitchforks.

This occurred along the river south of Brantford, from Cainsville to Onondaga and from Middleport to Caledonia. The Tutelos, who lived at what is now Tutela Heights, were also driven out in the same fashion. The Tutelos were part of the once numerous Neutral Confederacy that shared southern Ontario with the Hurons and Petuns (Tobacco Indians). They were also Iroquoians and, in fact, some of their ceremonies still survive in the Longhouse rituals at Six Nations.

It has been said that those who do not learn from their history are doomed to repeat it. However, before you can learn from it, you have to know what your history was. This year's Six Nations Pageant told it like it was.

Our Town is an Expositor feature which provides a forum for news and views from some of the smaller centres in the district. George Beaver is a Six Nations Reserve resident and was a teacher and principal on the Six Nations and New Credit reserves for 33 years.