'Fighting Tuscarora' central figure in Six Nations pageant

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With the recent surge of native activism, people talking about the fighting Tuscarora could be discussing the latest conflict between natives and the government.

Or they could be talking about Chief Clinton Ricard, a man born over a century ago who will come to life again during this year's Six Nations native pageant.

Chief Ricard was born to a poor family on the Tuscarora reserve near Niagara Falls, N.Y., in 1882. Although he had only the equivalent of a Grade 7 education, he became an expert in American history and native rights.

"He spent most of his life defending the rights and culture of native people," said Gary Hussey, one of the directors of the play.

"He was a founder of the Indian Defence League of America and he fought to open the (Canadian-American) border for native people to cross without hassles."

The Indian Defence League was formed mainly of Six Nations people in 1926 and is still active in the fight for native rights in Canada and the United States. The pageant was started by members of the group 42 years ago.

Chief Ricard spent many years in the army, but Mr. Hussey says that wasn't why he was called the fighting Tuscarora. "He didn't advocate violence . . . it was more from his verbal fights with the government and Department of Indian Affairs people."

Robert Jamieson will be playing a small role in the pageant. He says the reason for putting on a play each year is "to teach our young people . . . and our non-native neighbors about our history and culture."

There are about 20 roles in the play, all of which are filled by people from the Six Nations community. "We've still got to work out the bugs, we've got a lot to do to get ready," said Mr. Jamieson.

The play was written by George Beaver, a retired teacher from Six Nations. It's the third year in a row he's written the script, but he still finds it challenging.

"There was so much to put in, it kept getting longer and longer and I had to keep cutting it down.