

Meet the New Upper Cayuga (Sour Springs) Longhouse

By Chezney Martin

OHSWEKEN - The fire from the Old Upper Cayuga (Sour Springs) Longhouse on Third Line Road was moved on Friday, February 12, with a ceremony that many will not soon see again in the future.

Familiar faces from the Six Nations community were mixed with faces from outside communities dressed in traditional regalia, as many simply wanted to see the ceremony performed, or pay homage to the old longhouse they might have attended when they were young.

A long time attendee of the old longhouse and rattle and drum maker Art Johnson, explained that the old longhouse didn't always stand where it is today.

"I don't know how old I was when I started going there," said Johnson, mentioning that the date carved into the side of the old longhouse reads May 1892, but this date is the date it arrived from Second Line. "I have no idea how long it was up there,



A view of the new longhouse from the mens door - even this far away from the building, the scent of pine and new home lingers in the air. PHOTO BY CHEZNEY MARTIN

but I guess the land it sat on was owned by a Christian and she didn't want it on her land anymore. They took it apart there, and floated the logs down the creek, but that was back before it was the way it is now."

Johnson said the sides of the creek are full of thick brush today. "I remember when we were kids we used to go get water down at the creek to use at the longhouse

for them to use to cook with," he said, offering a reminder as to how much reminiscence is tied to the old longhouse.

Hearsay explains that the longhouse was moved from its location on Second Line during the divide in traditional and Christian families that existed early on in Six Nations, commonly referred to as the "Upper Ender" and "Down Belower" divide.

Johnson said the tobacco burning performed included words "for everything" in regards to the longhouse, especially ceremonies.

"It's for everything, like now the mid-winter ceremony, and everything that will go on all year long," he said. "It's also for the fire. They moved what they called the 'fire,' but it is katsista' (ga-jih-stut), that's wampum. And what people don't realize is that

it's the wampum that's the fire. Some people thought they would take the ashes from the old longhouse, and put them in the new one, but no, it's the wampum that's the fire for the longhouse."

Johnson said it is the same wampum taken to other longhouses during the Kariwi:io (ga-lee-wee-yo), or the recital of the Code of Handsome Lake.

The first part of the ceremony was put through in the old longhouse, with so many people in attendance families were sitting knee to knee. Once this part of the burning was complete, families within the old longhouse migrated to the new one, greeted by the smell of newly cut pine as they entered the beautifully spacious building.

The ceremony was completed with a Great Feather Dance and all in attendance were invited to eat within the cookhouse. This gave many the opportunity to discuss their feelings on the new building.

Johnson said the building of the longhouse received a lot of help from men from other longhouses, including Vernon Vyse and Roger Cook. As well, both doors to the new longhouse were hand made by Sam General.

Fund raising efforts for the new building went for months, as the accumulated cost of construction was just over \$110,000 with many members of

the old longhouse taking the initiative and time to construct the building themselves. Wall-to-wall benches, two wood stoves, corner shelves to hold food, and a wire strung across the centre to hang tobacco were all installed by hand.

Everything about the old longhouse shows that memories were made within it - the outside logging is blackened with age, the inside floors are covered in a permanent soot, and after leaving the old longhouse the smell of burning wood lingers. But, to those that have had generations of family members attending the old longhouse, it was a second home.

The new longhouse will need time before it can be 'the' longhouse, as the old one leaves much to live up to. But, with many young faces growing up in the original families of the old longhouse, the new one holds a lot of promise that it will be cherished as much as the last.



The date carved into the right side of the longhouse reads May 1892, but it is estimated that the building was located on Second Line from 10-50 years. This makes the building an approximate 134-174 years old, making it one of the oldest buildings still standing on Six Nations. PHOTO BY CHEZNEY MARTIN