

Kanonhstaton "The Protected Place": 10-years after

By Jim Windle

SIX NATIONS - It was one decade ago, but for many who were involved in the 2006 Caledonia land reclamation on both sides of the barricades, it still feels like yesterday.

What started out as an information campaign intended to educate Six Nations' non-Native neighbours and builders of outstanding land claims on an area being prepared for a large housing development just outside of Caledonia, evolved into one of the biggest news stories of the next two years and beyond.

Two Six Nations women, went before both the Elected Band Council and the Confederacy Chiefs Council seeking and attaining support for their efforts to stop the development until the land claims were settled. The inaction on this and other claims were taken to court by Six Nations Elected Council in 1995 but had been languishing in courts for more than 10 years after being filed. But records clearly show that these claims were known to the Canadian government for more than a century of been brought by many petitions to the Crown from Six Nations Traditional Chiefs.

According to Six Nations researchers and historians, the land, alongside what used to be called the Plank Road, now Highway #6, was never ceded for sale, only for lease and only under certain usage restrictions.

It is also part of the Haldimand Tract, which was deeded to the Mohawks and such others of the Six Nations that chose to remove themselves from the newly formed United States following the American Revolution.

The builders who had invested money and in some cases had already begun construction of a few homes on the DCR site were unwilling to accept that fact to be true and began to lobby the local government for help. The developer, The Henning Brothers, under the name Henco Homes, went to the



Ten years ago, on a cold, cold early February 28th morning, a handful of Six Nations women backed up by Clan Mothers and with the blessing of the Elected Council and the Confederacy Council, began what would become the Caledonia land reclamation. Six Nations men began to arrive to protect the women and the Caledonia land reclamation officially began. The land remains undeveloped to this day after the Ontario government purchased the land from the developer and allowed Six Nations land protectors to maintain presence on the troubled land still under land claim but still unresolved. PHOTO BY JIM WINDLE

courts in Cayuga to seek an injunction to remove those who had begun occupied of the site in the very cold early morning hours of Feb. 28, 2006.

The injunction was quickly granted and soon there were threats of police action to uphold the injunction. Rather than back down, Six Nations and allied supporters instead began an occupation and blocked the entrance to the site as support grew for a negotiated resolution before construction began.

Formal negotiations began between the province of Ontario under Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty, the federal Conservative government, Six Nations Confederacy Chiefs and the Six Nations Elected Council under Chief David General. In the beginning, the elected council chose to stand

down and let the Confederacy do the negotiations. OPP had promised that there would be no police action while negotiations were underway.

Following a very late night session, April 19, an erroneous report that negotiations had officially broke down was circulated and at around 4:20 a.m., ironically, on April 20, a major OPP operation was launched against those dwelling in a tent village on the property.

By 6 a.m., there were hundreds of Six Nations residents flooding onto Sixth Line Road at a place named by the occupiers as Silver Pines. By 10 a.m., their numbers overwhelmed the armed OPP insurgency and forced police to back off of the contested site, rather than trigger another Ip-

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perwash or Oka situation.

Fearing another OPP attack, two barricades were set up by Six Nations people on Highway #6, the railway line at the back of the site, and an incomplete roadway onto the site from the neighbouring Caledonia homes at what became known as "O-Town." The people of Six Nations also renamed the former Douglas Creek Estates Kanonhstaton, a Mohawk word meaning "protected place."

Caledonia residents set up their own road barricade when the protesters refused to be put off the site until their claims were addressed, even in the face of an injunction. Now, there were distinctive lines drawn on Argyle Street and the media poured in from near and far sending the story worldwide.

But in most cases, the story they told was obviously one sided and seriously skewed towards

the Caledonia resident who presented themselves as victims of domestic terrorism, which had become a powerful buzzword since the 9/11 attacks in New York.

To tell the entire story of Kanonhstaton would require a book and Toronto Columnist Cindy Blatchford was happy to oblige with a seriously flawed and obviously slanted chronicle she called "Helpless: Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear And Anarchy, And How The Law Failed All of Us".

Non-native author Laura DeVries tried to counter some of the misinformation in Blatchford's book with one of her own, adding much more background to the story. Her book, "Conflict in Caledonia" was published a few months later, but both were written from a white perspective by people who were not there when it happened and did not see or experience for themselves any of the events as they hap-

pened.

While Blatchford got most of her information from mainstream media reports and the hysterical ranting of certain Caledonia citizens. Only one short sentence in the entire book came from a Six Nations source — that of then elected Chief Bill Montour after a half-hour interview with Blatchford about the situation from his perspective.

DeVries, on the other hand, interviewed several participants in the protest from both sides of the issue and studied

contemporary Six Nations newspaper coverage to gain a more balanced perspective.

Today, 10 years later, Kanonhstaton remains naturalized after the province bought the land from Henco at a huge profit to the developer, to cool down the still smoldering situation.

Except for the occasional flare up instigated by a small group of Caledonia citizens, there has been a volatile peace come over the situation that still exists today. Six Nations believes they

have successfully reclaimed the land back to Six Nations and Ontario seems to be OK with that, for now, how although in their opinion, the land belongs to it and the province is "allowing" Six Nations to retain a symbolic presence on the land — for now.

According to Ontario's Land Registry, the property was put under Crown Patent in July 15, 1848, without Confederacy Approval. Then sold to George Rychtman and resold many times over in subsequent years.