

# Border rights 'turns up volume'

by Scott Smith

NIAGARA FALLS, NY -- Organizers of last weekend's 71st annual Indian Defense League of America's free border crossing celebration got a lot more of what they were looking for when they crossed the busy Rainbow Bridge this year instead of at the smaller Lower Arch bridge, as they have in previous years, and that was profile.

The Rainbow Bridge is located closest to the falls and spans the busy downtown areas in front of Casino Niagara on the Canadian side to the Rainbow Center mall area on the American side.

Traffic was backed up for kilometers on the Canadian side during the noon hour crossing Saturday as about 200 marchers made their way across the Rainbow Bridge from Oaks Garden park on the Canadian side to Prospect Park on the US side of the border.

After a brief tobacco offering ceremony at the base of a monument honouring Clinton Rickard,

founder of the Indian Defense League of America (IDLA), marchers and spectators disembarked for an afternoon of ballgames, speakers, singing and picnicking at nearby Hyde Park.

Jolene Rickard, granddaughter of the late Clinton Rickard, related to Tekawennake the fascinating story behind how and why the IDLA came into being, and the importance of carrying on the tradition of the border crossing to the next generation.

In the 1920s when assimilationist policies on both sides of the border were becoming particularly blatant and harsh, an onerous piece of US legislation called the Immigration Exclusion Act came into law which was primarily to effect Indians and Asians. It required that anyone wishing to come into the US had to be able to read and write in English.

"At that time a lot of our people weren't interested in reading or

... Continued on page 2

INDIAN DEFENSE LEAGUE OF AMERICA

**DEFENDING THE  
JAY TREATY OF  
1794**



*A marcher passes through the U.S. Customs booths at last Saturday's border crossing celebration in Niagara Falls. The sign says it all.*



# Falls crossing 'turns up volume' on border rights

Continued from front page ....



*Two young girls hold the Indian Defense League of America banner at Prospect Point just above the falls on the US side of the border. In back is a monument of the late Clinton Rickard, Tuscarora Chief and founder of the IDLA following the death of Deskaheh, a noted Iroquoian statesman.*

writing, and so they were detained and prevented from moving freely between out territories," explains Jolene Rickard, a historian for the IDLA.

"One man in particular got tangled up in the medicine line, as the old people used to call the border, and that was Deskaheh, who was just back from Geneva where he represented our people at the League of Nations.

"He stopped at our grandfathers house for respite because he was ill.

"While he was convalescing he sent for his medicine man from Six Nations. But he couldn't come across the border.

"Deskaheh passed away at my grandfather Chief Clinton Rickard's house, and after that my grandfather dedicated his life to keeping that border open for our

people so they would never be separated from each other again," says Ms Rickard.

And that's why she and others have kept the traditional border crossing celebration alive for 71 years.

"As the children of the people who started this, we understand that we have to assert ourselves to protect our rights. Nobody's going to give them to us. We have to constantly remind the Canadian and US governments that, to us, there are no borders. And it is our right to move freely in our homeland."

Rickard says that while efforts at teaching Iroquoian youth about their right to cross the broder may be laregly succeeding, in part helped by the frequency with which young lacrosse players and hockey players cross to compete

with one another, educating the population at large is still a daunting task.

"That's why we turned up the volume this year by crossing at the Rainbow today," she explains. "We need to be just a little more in thier face about it, because that's what we have to do. But we're going to do it in a positive way."

The next step, she says, is to extend the free border crossing day (there's normally a \$2 charge) the whole year round. "That's what we're working on next!" she laughs.

Rickard's cousin, Joseph Rickard Sr. is the current president of the IDLA. He says there are about 350 members in the organization right now. One of the main functions of the group, besides putting on the border

crossing, is to stay in touch with other nations that also have border rights.

"What we've found is that there are treaties right across [the country] between different Indian nations and white people that deal with the border, so what we need to do is keep track of these things so we can help each other out."

He admits that running an all volunteer organization in a day

and age when everyone has to work for a living does limit the IDLA's efforts. "It's different from when my grandfather was alive and they could write letters to people from morning to night. It amazes me yet how dedicated he was to it and how many contacts he had as a result

"But the goal is the same, and that's to make sure there is always an open border for our people."