

WILLIAM N. FENTON

"THE ONE WHO SLEPT IN A TENT"

At the moon of midwinter, 1968, I revisited my Seneca friends of Coldspring Longhouse, on the Allegany Reservation near Salamanca, New York, where I had commenced ethnological field work in the summer of 1933. Now, some thirty-five years later, I was hoping to see once again the ceremonies that mark the Indian New Year. From time to time I had returned, and in particular I had followed the affairs of the Seneca nation during their tragic struggle against the building of the Kinzua Dam on the Allegheny River, and I had chaired an advisory committee to the nation. I had described the rebuilding of their homes, but I had not attended the doings at the new longhouse where recently they removed their fire. This modern structure near Steamburg was built with funds received from the United States Congress in partial compensation for 9,000 acres taken for the reservoir. The old settlement at Coldspring which I had known was obliterated. Not since Sullivan's army destroyed their towns and crops during the American Revolution had the Seneca people suffered such cultural loss. I wondered how the shock of being uprooted would affect the performance of their ceremonies.

I reached "New Coldspring" on the morning that "Our Uncles, the Big-heads" traditionally go out at dawn, progressing from house to house, hailing the men as nephews, and urging them to renew all obligations revealed through dreams. I immediately learned that the Uncles did not go out that dawn, and I inferred that they no longer made the circuit of houses and that I could probably expect other radical changes. Ed Coury, the speaker of the longhouse, confirmed my first inference. "There was no one at home to receive them," he said; "their nephews were either at the longhouse or at work."

It was good, nevertheless, to see familiar faces among the small crowd assembled in the longhouse. For a moment seeing these old friends diverted me from the startlingly modern surroundings. Among the people were some I had known from the first summer I had spent in the community, thirty-five