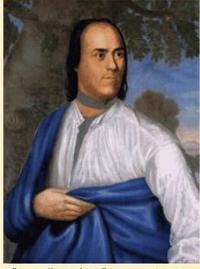




Tribal Education for Brothertown Children

The Brothertown Movement from New England to Oneida lands in New York

**(Much of this article is developed from articles from Milwaukee Public Museum and the Marshall Historical Society).*



"An Indian Priest," Samson Occom, painted by Nathaniel Stribert, 1751-56
Credit Bowdoin College Museum of Art

In the 1770s, Samson Occom and Joseph Johnson, both Mohegan, were determined to lead their people and other New England Indians to a home where they could live in peace and lead Christian lives. Samson Occom, a Presbyterian minister, served as a Christian missionary to other Indian tribes as well. Following negotiations with the Oneida tribe in north central New York, Occom and Johnson led a group of New England tribal families to a new home among the Oneida.

They were made up of the 7 Tribal villages of:

- [Mohegan](#) – Mohegan, Connecticut
- [Montaukett](#) – Montauk, New York
- [Narragansett](#) – Charleston, Rhode Island
- [Niantic](#) – Rhode Island and Connecticut
- **Pequot** – Connecticut
 - [Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation](#) – Mashantucket
 - [Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation](#) – North Stonington
- [Tunxis](#) – Farmington, Connecticut.

As Christians, they wanted to live in Brotherhood, and named their new home Brothertown. Another group of Algonkian-speaking people, the Stockbridge, also moved onto lands granted by the Oneida in the 1780s, escaping pressures from incoming settlers in western Massachusetts.

To Oneida lands:

Some leaders of the Brothertown movement were Rev. Samson Occom, a Mohegan who was an ordained Presbyterian minister, David Fowler, Jacob Fowler, Montauk, and Joseph Johnson, a Mohegan.

In July 1774, Occom traveled to the Oneida territory with David Fowler to further articulate the understanding they had reached concerning the Eastern Christian Indians migration to the west. He met again Samuel Kirkland, missionary to the Oneidas, and according to his journal they "embraced each other with joy."

In October of that year, they were joined by Mohegan Joseph Johnson, Occom's son-in-law, and Guy Johnson, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, to serve as negotiators. The Oneida Indians signed over to the New England Christian Indians, as they were known, a tract of land of about 12 square miles which stretched approximately from Madison Lake to College Hill, Clinton west of the

Line of Property of 1768 "without power of alienation." That meant they could hunt and conduct their own affairs in Oneida territory but could neither sell nor lease the land to other Indians nor to white settlers. In the Iroquois tradition, the New England Indians became politically subordinate to the Oneidas, while retaining the right to manage their own internal affairs; in their negotiations, the Oneida Indians "adopted" the Christian Indians, in effect becoming their elder brothers.

The arrival of the first Brothertowns

The first contingent to New York was in 1775, led by Joseph Johnson and David Fowler, with 50-75 settlers. Occom followed a few years later, after attempting to earn extra money by preaching along the route. They set about clearing land, planting crops, building houses. However, that turned out to be a poor time in which to settle, as the Revolutionary War broke out in earnest in New York State, causing the tribes to scatter, due to conflicting allegiances and interrupting further immigration. Some went back to their New England homes; others were protected at Fort Stanwix in Rome New York; while some fled to the Stockbridge Indians in Massachusetts.

Samson Occom counseled neutrality, because he didn't want his people in the middle of a white man's war. This put the Brotherton at odds with the Oneidas, who supported the Colonists. Soon after the war began, the Brothertown Indians did fight on the side of the colonists and suffered heavy losses in consequence. For example, Joseph Johnson, who was part of the group which negotiated with the Oneidas, disappeared while he was on a mission of peace for General Washington. That was a huge blow to the community.

In 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed, the war was over, and little by little the New England Christian Indians returned to their village with members of the Stockbridge Indians, who had suffered in much the same way, to find that the potatoes they had planted had multiplied.

As They were known at that point, the New England Christian Indians felt it was time to formally organize into their new community, so in 1785 they named themselves Brothertown or "Eeyawquittoowauconnuck" (pronounced - Ee-yaw-quittoo-wau-connuck), because they intended to live in brotherhood and harmony the rest of their lives.

They adopted a government much like that of the New England settlers, particularly Connecticut, which they felt would give them more autonomy and independence. They elected officers, such as peacemakers, fence-viewers, overseer of the poor, and two marshals. There were very strict rules regarding profanity, intoxication, adultery, neglect of children, theft, and idleness.

Samson Occom was their spiritual leader and the glue that held them together. They also came back to find that their relationship with the Oneida had cooled. The Oneidas felt that the Brothertown Indians had not honored their contract during the war and that the tribe had become intermixed with other tribes and races, despite Occom's best efforts to keep that from happening. The Oneidas believed this violated their contract. But most grievous of all, they had failed to honor and support their elder brothers.



Even though the Brotherton did not remain neutral during the Revolutionary War, the Oneidas held their initial neutrality against them. The Oneidas pointed out that kinship worked both ways and believed that the Brothertown Indians had violated a fundamental trust, that of a younger brother honoring and supporting the elder brother, especially in time of war.

Whatever the reason was, the Oneidas wanted their land back. Occom and Fowler dug in their heels, telling them no, the land transfer had been above board and witnessed by the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Then the Oneida wanted to reduce our land to 640 or one square mile. They again said no, they wanted the original 12 square miles, as agreed upon. The Oneidas gave them several more options (live at large on their land; different sizes of land), until Samson Occom, tired of being pestered by the Oneidas, who wanted them out, applied to the secretary of state's help. The Treaty of Fort Schuyler of 1788 granted the Brothertown Indians 2 miles in breadth and 3 miles in length. The Stockbridge Indians were granted six square miles. In 1789 the state intervened again to acquire a large parcel of land from the Oneidas in exchange for money, and then gave the land to the Brothertown Indians with the added benefit that they would be able to lease the land for up to 10 years to the land-hungry whites, who were supposed to stay out of Indian land per the Line of Property established in 1768 to keep whites out. Samson Occom counseled against leasing: what if they never got their land back? He saw it as a real risk toward the Indians, once again, losing their land.



Sadly, when Occom, their leader, died in 1792, the Brothertown fell apart as a community. They became prey to religious factions and leased their land so randomly, now that Occom was not there to warn against it, that they were in danger of losing it altogether. All this came to the attention of Governor George Clinton, who admired Occom. In 1795, about 60% of the land was sold to the whites at about 16 shillings an acre, and the money put into trust for the future of the Brothertown Indians. 40% of the land was divided into 149 lots for the Brothertown Indians. Through this effort, the Brothertown kept their land, but this divested the tribe of more of its independence. Even so, the lobbying efforts of the leaders, coupled with the benevolence of the state authorities ensured the survival of the Brotherton, and Samson Occom's efforts, wisdom, and courage were rewarded.

In the end, Governor Clinton felt that, with the absence of Samson Occom, the Brotherton needed someone to oversee them and protect their interests. He arranged for John Dean, a Quaker, to take over guardianship of the Indians. The Brotherton were wary of this appointment. They saw it as yet another threat against their autonomy.

John Dean arrived in 1795, and three years later, brought his wife and 19-year-old son Thomas to the area. They lived right in the center in what is now downtown Deansboro. They knew how to guide the Indians without offending their autonomy. They played an important role in the stability and sustainability of the community. For several years, the Brothertown community went along smoothly. They had sawmills, grist mills, tanneries. The lands were cleared and planted, and the houses well-built and numerous. At its height, Brothertown boasted at least 200 people, and thousands of acres were cleared and cultivated.

During this time however, the whites kept pressuring the Brotherton to let them lease their farms and kept trespassing onto their territory. Thomas Dean, who had taken over for his father by that time, could see that the Indians were not treated fairly by the whites and were being pushed out.

? Thomas Dean sought for land for the Brotherton. He first traveled with some tribe members to Indiana, and later were offered land in Wisconsin. He traveled with them down the Erie Canal to Buffalo, to the Great Lakes and Green Bay, Wisconsin, to a large tract of land (over 26,000 acres) on the Fox River. They had hardly settled in, however, when the government negotiated land on Lake Winnebago, where they moved next.

Between the years 1824 and 1848 most of the Brothertown Indians in New York had moved to Wisconsin. The early years in Wisconsin were good for the Brothertown Indians. They excelled in many trades and made significant progress in agriculture.

A Side note:

In 1826, a few years before the Brothertown Indians emigrated to Wisconsin, Romance Wyatt was born of Indian blood. His father and mother died when he was a child, and he was adopted and brought up by Asa and Cynthia Dick.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, he enlisted in the Twenty-sixth Regiment and later fought with the Eighty-third, seeing service at Chancellorsville, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg, and at the battle of Little Round Top. After the war he married a "Yankee" and remained a proud Indian through his entire life. Of the 600 Brothertown Indians who at one time occupied the reservation, given to them by the Oneidas, Romance Wyatt was the last one left to tell the story of his people. He passed away September 30, 1907, and was laid to rest in Deansboro cemetery.

Kanoarohare January the 20th AD 1774

A Speech to the Oneida Indians, By Joseph Johnson an Indian of the Mohegan Tribe, chosen to act on the Behalf of the New England Indians.

"Brethren this Silver Pipe was sent to me, and this tobacco Pouch with it, to dispose of them according to the advice of his Honor Sir William Johnson. Brethren with pleasure I would tell you that Sir William received us gladly at this time also, and he advised me to deliver this pipe to the Chiefs at the Meeting, and to let the Pipe be kept in the Council house continually, so at your assemblings ye might look on it; and smoke out of it, and remember us your Brothers in New England. His Honor Sir William said also, perhaps ye would think it very odd if there was no Tobacco in the Pouch, so his Honor was pleased to fill the Pouch, and sent it by me, to you chiefs, that this day ye might smoke out of this Silver Pipe. So now I deliver this Pipe unto you, as a Sure token from our Several Tribes in New England that we are one and sincere in what we say and do".

