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The People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Nation From the Revolution Through the Era of Removal

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The Material Culture of Oquaga in the Collection of the Peabody Essex Museum

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The Material Culture of Oquaga in the Collection of the Peabody Essex Museum

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Oquaga

Located on the Susquehanna River, near the vertex of the Fort Stanwix treaty line, Oquaga (here spelled "Onoghquagy") was the southernmost Oneida town. Its population probably did not exceed 250, but was particularly diverse, including Tuscaroras, Cayugas, Mohawks, Mahicans, Nanticokes, and Shawnees.



In 1779, an American military officer wrote, "It was the finest Indian town I ever saw...on both sides of the river there was about 40 good houses, Square logs, Shingles & stone chimneys, good Floors, glass windows &c &c."

The prosperity and cultural openness that characterized Oquaga is also visible in three items of Native manufacture collected by Ebenezer Moseley. A Yale-educated missionary from Connecticut, Moseley resided at Oquaga between 1765 and 1773. His mission was supported by the Britain-based Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and Parts Adjacent.

Map of the Country of the VI Nations by Guy Johnson, New York State Library, Albany



1. Pipe Bowl

Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Moseley, 1981, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. (E68211). Photo courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum

This pipe bowl with an otter face was made of catlinite pipestone obtained from a quarry in present-day Minnesota. It is unknown whether the catlinite arrived at Oquaga as raw material or a finished object. It resembles Ojibwe styles, but bears a faint Iroquois-language inscription onaongodan raonnawen—"the prominent one, his pipe."



2. Moccasins

Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Moseley, 1981, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum (E68212)

These moccasins reflect traditional Iroquois styling. They are decorated with dyed porcupine quills, deer hair, metal bangles, and glass beads. By 1850, Iroquois craftspeople used glass beads in greater quantities and more elaborate patterns, while porcupine quills had fallen into disuse.



3. Moccasins

Iroquois, early 19th century, provenance unknown Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Moseley, 1981, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem,

Mass. Photo courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum (E21451)

Early in the 1800s, Canadian civil servant George Heriot described moccasins and their production:

The leggings have no feet and are tucked into moccasins of a single skin with no heel and no strong leather sole. It is puckered over the toes of the foot, where it is sewn with cords of gut to a little leather tongue. Then it is taken up with ties of the same skin, passed through holes cut at regular intervals and tied above the heel after being crossed on the instep of the foot...Different sorts of threads are interwoven very neatly with moose, buffalo and porcupine skins [quills] dyed in different colours.

The Missionary at Work

Traveler Richard Smith published the following eyewitness account of Moseley's efforts in 1769. He took particular note of Moseley's dress.

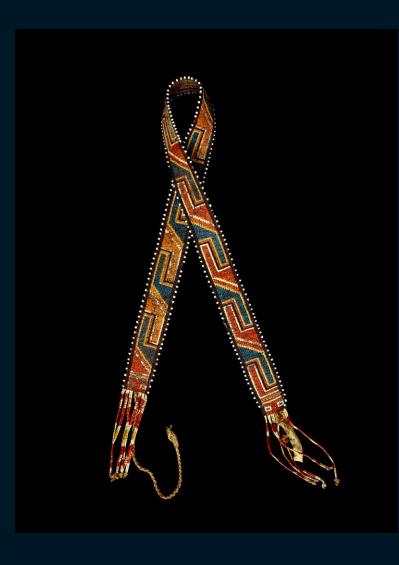
June 4th. Sunday, in the Morning we attended Divine Service which was conducted with regularity and Solemnity. They first sang a Psalm, then read a Portion of Scripture and after another Psalm Moseley preached a sermon (in a chintz Night Gown) and the Business was concluded by a Third Psalm. The Congregation consisted of near 100 Indians, Men, Women, and Children including the chief of the Tuscarora Town 3 miles below with some of his People & they all behave with exemplary devotion.

For most of his tenure, Moseley was assisted by a young man from Connecticut, James Dean, who was fluent in the Oneida language, as well as two politically prominent Oneida converts, Isaac Dekayensese and Agwelondongwas (Good Peter).

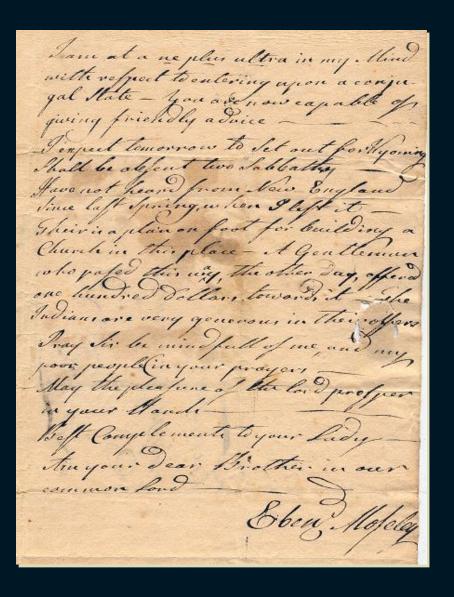
4. Belt

Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Moseley, 1981, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum (E68210)

This colorful belt was manufactured from moose hair, plant fibers such as corn husk and hemp, and trimmed with white glass beads. As is likely true of the moccasins, the belt's creator was probably a woman. Figures 8 and 17 in *The People of the Standing Stone* suggest how the belt was probably worn.



The End of the Moseley Mission...and Oquaga



Moseley carried on a correspondence with Samuel Kirkland, his counterpart at Kanonwalohale, the Oneidas' principal village. In 1770, Moseley wrote his recentlymarried colleague:

Dear Sir, my Situation is very lonesome and desolate, no Suitable companion for Society, nor even a house keeper to wash my dishes. I long much to see you, to know whether Hymens prison is a palace of Joy, and his Silken bands, cords of Friendship, or the reverse. I am at a ne plus ultra in my Mind with respect to entering upon a conjugal State. You are now capable of giving friendly advice.

Samuel Kirkland Papers, Hamilton College Archives, 10a By the end of 1771, Moseley had decided to terminate his mission. A disapproving Kirkland responded:

I am sorry to hear you are about to quit the business of your mission... You will deem it an Act of friendship in me to inform you [that] it has been suggested to the Indians (as they tell me) "that you leave your mission for filthy lucre's sake, that you design to cross the Atlantic, purchase a quantity of goods & pursue the mercantile life." ... I hope these are no more than suggestions, upon meer conjecture. You are doubtless sensible, the Honor of Religⁿ in these parts depends not a little upon your future employment.

Moseley abandoned both the mission and the ministry. He returned to Connecticut, where he became a merchant, farmer, and a local leader in the revolutionary movement. He was a colonel in the Connecticut militia and served in the state legislature. Moseley died in 1825.

Oquaga was not as long-lived. Patriots burned the town to the ground in 1779 in retaliation for some Oquagans' support for Britain. Most Oquagans took refuge at Fort Niagara or Kanonwalohale. The town was not reoccupied after the war, and was part of the territory lost to New York State in the 1785 Fort Herkimer treaty.

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