THE REVOLUTION THROUGH
THE EYES OF A SENECA WOMAN

The life story of Mary Jemison, the white woman who spent most of her life with the Senecas, affords a rare glimpse into the impact of the Revolution on the Indians’ home front, as seen through the eyes of a wife and mother (Mary gave birth to a daughter in the first year of the war). Mary Jemison saw the Iroquois delegates return from the German Flats council in 1775 believing they were secure in their neutrality; she observed the shift toward hostilities after the Oswego council in 1777; she saw Seneca warriors return from the bloody battle at Oriskany near Fort Stanwix in 1777; and she saw General John Sullivan’s army march through Iroquoia destroying towns and crops in 1779. The American Revolution, celebrated in the nation’s history and mythology, meant something different for Indian women who lived and suffered through it.

MARY JEMISON

A View of the Revolution
1775–1779

Thus, at peace amongst themselves, and with the neighboring whites, though there were none at that time very near, our Indians lived quietly and peaceably at home, till a little before the breaking out of the revolutionary war, when they were sent for, together with the Chiefs and members of the Six Nations generally, by the people of the States, to go to the German Flats, and there hold a general council, in order that the people of the states might ascertain, in good season, who they should esteem and treat as enemies, and who as friends, in the great war which was then upon the point of breaking out between them and the King of England.

Our Indians obeyed the call, and the council was held, at which the pipe of peace was smoked, and a treaty made, in which the Six Nations solemnly agreed that if a war should eventually break out, they would not take up

James Seaver, ed., The Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison (1824 and various editions).
November 1781
Speech to British Colonel Deppester