

ARTHUR CASWELL PARKER 1881-1955

Arthur Parker was born April 5, 1881 on the Cattaragus Indian Reservation near Gowanda, New York to a half-Seneca father and a white mother. Parker's Great Uncle was Ely S. Parker, who drafted the articles of surrender General Lee signed to end the Civil War. Because his mother was non-Indian, Parker was considered white. As a young child, he listened to the stories told by tribal elders and developed a fascination with and a passion for studying Iroquois history and culture.

When he was 11 years old his family moved from the reservation to White Plains, NY where Arthur attended public school. He made frequent trips to New York to view the Indian collections and in the process befriended the director who provided opportunities for Arthur to further his independent studies. However, instead of following his youthful ambitions, Parker took his father's advice and enrolled in a seminary instead. After three years of study, Parker left school and actively pursued research, writing and field work in Archaeology.

While still a young man, Parker was adopted into the Seneca Bear Clan and received the name Gawaso Wanneh (Big Snakesnake). In 1904 he married Beulah Tahamont, an Abenaki Indian, and they had two children. Later, in 1914, he married Anna Cooke, a white woman, and they had one child.



In 1904 Parker was hired by the New York State Museum as a field worker which led to an appointment as State Archaeologist. He became a prolific writer and published many articles of lasting importance. Parker was present when the capitol burned in 1911 and many of the artifacts collected by his Great Uncle's friend Lewis Henry Morgan were destroyed. Parker was able to save some of the collection, but much was lost.

In 1907 Parker became a Mason, eventually reaching 33rd degree 14 years later. In 1911 he founded the Society of American Indians.

In 1924 Parker left Albany for Rochester where he took the post of director at the Municipal Museum. His work in Rochester was very progressive, and he did much to

make museums accessible to all, regardless of age. He was active with school outreach programs, and even wrote a book of Seneca stories for children. He reconfigured the museum and spent a great deal of time developing accurate dioramas, which were loved by visitors of all ages.

During the depression years times were very hard for those living on the reservations, and Iroquois culture was on the verge of extinction. In 1935, Parker began a program known as the Indian Arts Project which was eventually funded by the WPA. The project provided employment for those on reservations and led to a rebirth of traditional crafts and art, and also helped to replicate some of the items lost in the capitol fire.



Since 1912 Parker had had a strong interest in the Boy Scout movement and in 1932 began a program for Scouts to assist on Archaeological digs. In 1936 he was visited by a group of Boy Scouts who were in the process of organizing a local lodge of the Order of the Arrow. Parker suggested the name "Ty-Ohni" meaning "Wolf" in the Seneca language. In 1943 when the Rochester and Red Jacket Councils merged to form Otetiana Council, the name gained even further significance since Chief Otetiani (Red Jacket) had been a member of the Seneca Wolf Clan. Parker wrote a biography of Red Jacket for young people in 1952.

In the early 1940's Parker was instrumental in the relocation of the Rochester museum to its present location on East Avenue and did much to build their collections of Iroquois artifacts. He retired in 1946 and moved with his wife Ann to a home in Naples, not far from the site of the old Camp Otetiana and Bare Hill, where tradition says the Seneca people originated. Parker died there on the afternoon of January 1, 1955.

