A TUTELO HERITAGE: AN ETHNOLITERARY ASSESSMENT OF CHIEF SAMUEL JOHNS’ CORRESPONDENCE WITH DR. FRANK G. SPECK

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Abstract / Résumé

During the mid 1930s, Chief Samuel Johns entered into a brief correspondence with the noted anthropologist Dr. Frank G. Speck. Examining this correspondence, this essay gives interpretation to the ethno-literary considerations manifest in the Johns’ letters.

Vers le milieu des années 1930, le chef Samuel Johns a correspondu brièvement avec l’anthropologue renommé Frank G. Speck. Le présent article examine la correspondance des deux hommes et donne une interprétation des éléments ethno-littéraires manifestes dans les lettres du chef Johns.

Obscured in the miasma of internecine warfare with an aggressive and expansive Iroquois Confederacy, there remains little ethnographical literature for the Tutelo Indians of Monascane, central Virginia. Within the Frank G. Speck papers archived at the American Philosophical Society, there is, however, an intriguing correspondence from a Native Elder living on the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario. During the mid 1930s, Chief Samuel Johns entered into a brief correspondence with the noted University of Pennsylvania anthropologist, Dr. Frank Gouldsmith Speck. Johns initially wrote Speck from Middlemass, Ontario on September 4, 1934. In his first letter, Johns revealed his Tutelo ancestry and requested historical information regarding the tribe. On December 31, 1934, Johns again wrote Speck informing him of historical findings that report the Tutelo country along the east branch of the Susquehanna River near present day Athens, Pennsylvania. Subsequently on January 8, 1935, Johns, apparently replied to Speck, informing him of some Tutelo tradition and requesting that he visit the reserve during “the balmy month of May.” Finally on June 2, 1935, Johns responded to Speck with arrangements for his visit, including dinner plans. There is also a curious decline from Johns to “write up a short history of our people...on the reserve,” although he immediately recants and offers to give it a try. Given Johns interest in the Tutelo, then surely this reference to “our people on the reserve” implicates the history of the Tutelo among the Six Nations at Grand River.

While these letters of Chief Johns reveal an interesting insight into the enduring complexity of American Indian identity, in this essay, I offer the letters for review and explore the literary and humanistic qualities of this correspondence. In this ethnocritical assessment of these letters, there are five themes that merit our consideration. These include an assessment of oral tradition, a Native kinship ethos, socio-cultural traditions, Tutelo history, and the Native regard for anthropology specifically Dr. Frank Speck as anthropologist.

Although Speck gave considerable effort to recording Tutelo traditions, there remains the question of a Tutelo history. While this essay cannot begin to recreate that history given its purpose of assessing the ethnoliterary characteristics of the Johns' letters, there are compelling reasons to investigate the concerns raised by Chief Johns. Particularly significant are the historical ties of the Tutelo to Virginia and their tribal migration to Ontario. It is to these ends that I will attempt to address Chief Johns' inquiry and supply some short history of the Tutelo while addressing his letters to Speck.

During the late nineteenth century considerable excitement was generated among anthropologists to discover a Siouan language among
the Six Nations Iroquois near Brantford, Ontario. Credit for discovering the Tutelo linguistic relationship with the Dakota Siouan language family was given to the philologist Horatio Hale. While residing at Clinton, Ontario, Hale made a visit to an old Native man named Nikungha (Nikonha) said to be the last survivor of the Tutelos. Reported by Anderson:

This venerable Indian, who has died since Mr. Hale’s visit, at the advanced age of a hundred and six years, or thereabout, resided on the Reserve of the Six Nations, near Brantford. The Tuteloes, of whom he was the last representative of pure blood, had been looked upon by ethnologists as an Iroquois tribe, chiefly because holding a place in the Iroquois confederacy. But the list of words obtained by Mr. Hale from Nikungha showed conclusively that the Tutelo language belonged not to the Iroquois but to the Dakotan stock.

In his 1883 report on the subject, Hale notes that the Tutelo were among several tribes speaking a Dakota language in Virginia and the Carolinas when encountered by European explorers. Said to be of the Monacan Confederacy, the most closely allied tribes with the Tutelo were the Saponi, Keyauwee, Occaneechi and Eno or Schoicories according to Lawson.

Classified amid the Monacan Division of Eastern Siouan nations, the Tutelo together with the Saponi were known as Nahyssans and they were one of three Monacan tribal confederations during the colonial contact era. As Aboriginals, these Monacan tribes occupied the Virginia Piedmont, Blue Ridge and Valley provinces, as well as, westward along the New River into present-day West Virginia. Of these, the Nahyssan group, including the Yesang or Tutelo and the Monasukapanough or Saponi occupied the central Piedmont, Blue Ridge and Valley region near contemporary Lynchburg living in an area of general expanse from present-day Charlottesville to Roanoke.

Mooney informs us that until 1670, these Monacan tribes had been “little disturbed by whites,” although they were given to much shifting about due to “the wars waged against them by the Iroquois.” Initial contacts with colonial explorers and the Nahyssans, Yesang and Saponi, began in the 1670s with the German physician-explorer, John Lederer, as well as, the trade oriented Batts and Fallam expedition. It was, apparent, however, that independent Indian traders had already made commercial and social inroads among the central Virginia tribes. By the time of Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676, the Nahyssan tribes had begun to ally themselves together in close association near their Occaneechi confederates on a series of islands in the presently known Roanoke River near
contemporary Clarksville, Virginia. Prompted to this defensive strategy by their implacable enemies from the north, the Iroquois, the Nahyssans were forced to seek security in treaty alliance with the Virginia colony. By 1685 Iroquois raids directed at the Tutelos in Virginia triggered the colonial governor of Virginia, Lord Howard of Effingham, to treat with the Hodenosaunee at Albany. The Iroquois had been harassing the Tutelos, who were under the supervision and protection of Virginia, with the intent of driving them “into the Covenant Chain as direct tributaries of the Five Nations rather than through the intermediation of Virginia.”

Lord Howard's treaty concluded with a pledge from the Iroquois to stay behind the mountains and beyond the Virginia settlements, however, the Hodenosaunee “demanded that the Virginians send one of their allied tribes to become an Iroquois tributary.” While Lord Howard assumed he had secured the League’s agreement to halt their wars upon the Virginia tribal tributaries, including the Tutelos, it was by no means settled and the Iroquois continued to raid the Nahyssans.

In accordance with the frontier policy of Virginia Governor Alexander Spotswood, these Nahyssan tribes agreed in 1714 by treaty to occupy and possess the Fort Christanna Reservation near present-day Lawrenceville, Virginia. A mutual protection compact, the 1714 treaty provided for a reservation of six miles squares, a palisaded fort with cannons and a group of armed rangers for defense, and a school for Indian children, as well as, a governing factor commanding the post and administering Indian affairs under the authority of the Virginia Indian Company. Continuing their depredations against the Nahyssans, the Iroquois in 1777 launched an attack upon a visiting delegation of Catawba leaders who were camped outside the fort as invited guest of the Virginia government. While Iroquois raiding parties continued to boldly march home through the colonial settlements of Virginia in 1719, Spotswood began negotiation with the governors of Pennsylvania and New York seeking a means to secure peace with the Hodenosaunee, Iroquois Confederacy. As his concerns increased, Spotswood communicated his fears regarding these “Northern Indians” to the Virginia executive council declaring that the Iroquois were “threatening to come in greater Numbers to Fall upon the English of the Colony and so cut off and destroy the Sapponie Indians.” Governor Spotswood, accordingly, petitioned the New York government and the Hodenosaunee for a conference designed to secure a lasting peace.

In September 1722, during the treaty conference at Albany, the Iroquois revealed their bitter hatred towards the Nahyssan tribes.

“Though there is among you,” they replied to the Virginians,

“a nation, the Todirichones, against whom we have had so
inveterate an enmity that we thought it could only be extin-

guished by their total extirpation, yet, since you desire it, we

are willing to receive them into this peace, and to forget all

the past.”  

Even afterwards, in 1729 when renewing the covenant of 1685 with Vir-

ginia and Maryland, the Iroquois deputies presented a wampum belt to

Governor Spotswood “in token of their friendship, and blandly requested

permission to exterminate the Totero [Tutelo].” Indeed, Mooney con-

cluded, “The great overmastering fact in the history of the Siouan tribes

of the east is that of their destruction by the Iroquois.”

Apparent a variation of Todirichrone, Totera was a common term

used by the Iroquois to describe the Virginia and Carolina Siouans. The

emergence of the term Tutelo evidences an Algonquian corruption of

Totera. While Tutelo is commonly used in historical records and be-

came a mainstay in ethnographical jargon, the people themselves used

the name Yesang or Yesah, real men, when identifying their nation.

As noted earlier, the Tutelos who migrated north, first as tributaries of the

Iroquois and second as national confederates of the Hodenosaunee,

were, in fact, Nahyssans comprising remnants of the Saponi, Yesang,

and Occaneechi tribes.

For the most part, the bitter enmity existing between the Tutelo and

the Iroquois was extinguished by virtue of the 1722 Treaty of Albany.

During the somewhat indeterminate decade that followed the treaty, the

Tutelos placed themselves under the protection of the Six Nations or

Hodenosaunee and moved northward across Virginia to Shamokin, pre-

sent-day Sunbury, Pennsylvania, at the forks of the Susquehanna

River. At Shamokin, the Tutelo together with several Algonquian tribes

including the Delaware, Munsee-Mahican, Nanticoke, Conoy, and later

the Shawnee were collectively brought under the governance of an

Oneida Chieftain, Shikellamy, who served as viceroy for the Iroquois

conquered lands and peoples in the Susquehanna region. By Septem-

ber 1753, during the great Council of the Six Nations held at Onondaga,

the Cayugas resolved to “strengthening their castle’ by taking in the

Tedarighroones.”

Following this induction into the Hodenosaunsee, the Great League

of the Iroquois or Six Nations, the Tutelo joined their Cayuga sponsors

at the South end of Cayuga Lake near Ithaca, New York. Opposite the

present Buttermilk Falls State Park, the Tutelo town was known as

Coreorgonel. In 1779, during the American Revolutionary War, Lt. Colo-

nel Henry Dearborn under the command of Lt. General John Sullivan

attacked and destroyed the town. As a result, the Tutelo and their

Cayuga sponsors accompanied Mohawk leader Joseph Brant to On-
tario, Canada and British sanctuary on the Six Nations Reserve near present day Brantford. Establishing themselves on an elevated bench along the Western bank of the Grand River, the Tutelo numbered two hundred when they began life on the Reserve. In 1832, an Asiatic cholera epidemic broke out among them and destroyed the greater part of the tribe. When a second plague arrived in 1848, the Tutelo ceased to exist as a nation and the few survivors fled the Heights to merge among the Cayuga. As a result, the Tutelo legacy is remembered today only in the suburban Brantford name, Tutelo Heights.  

By 1870 only one full-blooded Tutelo was thought to be living, his name was *Nikonha*, “mosquito,” and he was a pensioner from having served in the War of 1812. Accompanied by the government interpreter, Chief George Johnson, Hale sought out *Nikonha* and supplied the following description.

His appearance, as we first saw him, basking in the sunshine on the slope before his cabin, confirmed the reports, which I had heard, both of his great age and of his marked intelligence. “A wrinkled, smiling countenance, a high forehead, half-shut eyes, white hair, a scanty, stubby beard, fingers bent with age like a bird’s claws,” is the description recorded in my note-book. Not only in physiognomy, but also in demeanor and character, he differed strikingly from the grave and composed Iroquois among whom he dwelt. The lively, mirthful disposition of his race survived in full force in its latest member. His replies to our inquiries were intermingled with many jacose remarks, and much good-humored laughter.

Despite going by the Cayuga name *Nikonha*, “mosquito,” he gave a Tutelo name *Waskiteng* which may have been another reference to the mosquito or its effect. *Waskiteng* or *Nikonha* informed Hale that his father, *Onusowa*, was a Chief among the Tutelos and that his mother had died when he was young. As a result, Waskiteng was raised by his uncle for whom there is no record.

Married to a Cayuga wife, the “Old Mosquito” had for many years spoken only the language of her people until Hale prevailed upon him to render nearly one hundred Tutelo words in their first meeting. Despite *Waskiteng’s* status as the presumed last full-blooded Tutelo, Hale reported that there were nonetheless:

several half-castes, children of Tutelo mothers by Iroquois fathers, who know the language, and by the native law (which traces descent through the female) are held to be Tutelos. One of them, who sat in the council as the representative of
Chief Samuel Johns' Correspondence with Dr. Frank G. Speck

the tribe, and who, with a conservatism worthy of the days of old Sarum, was allowed to retain his seat after his constituency had disappeared, was accustomed to amuse his grave fellow-senators occasionally by asserting the right which each councilor possesses of addressing the council in the language of his people, — his speech, if necessity requires, being translated by an interpreter. In the case of the Tutelo chief the jest, which was duly appreciated, lay in the fact that the interpreters were dumbfounded, and that the eloquence uttered in an unknown tongue had to go without reply.31

Although Hale supplies no reference to the identity of this Tutelo Chief, an apparent contemporary of “Old Mosquito” was known as John Tutela or Göhe, “Panther” in Cayuga. He died March 6, 1888 at one hundred years old. Despite surviving Waskiteng or Nikonha some seventeen years, he too had fought in the War of 1812 and shortly before his death he bequeathed a hickory stick, the symbol of chieftainship, which he had cut in 1812 at Queenston Heights, to a Canadian Inspector Dingham.32 Another Tutelo descendant, John Key, Nastabon (One Step) likewise survived “Old Mosquito.” It was said that Nastabon, John Key, lived without kith or kin and with no other living person with who he could speak his own language. He died March 23, 1898 at 78 years old.33 Either of these two individuals could have been the old chief of whom Hale referenced among the Six Nations Council meetings. Certainly John Tutela’s hickory staff reflects the symbolism of a Chief while Nastabon’s [or Key’s] sold knowledge of the language gives him credibility for the post.

In 1885, knowledge of the Tutelos was also given to J. N. Hewitt by the Cayuga Chief, James Monture, and confirmed by Chief John Buck,34 the Firekeeper at the Oshweken Council House of the Six Nations Reserve. Buck was the Tutelo Tribal Chief and representative in the Six Nations Council until his death in 1935. He held the name Dikáhku that he understood to denote “Chief” in the Tutelo language.35 The Hewitt record describes the Five Confederated Nations—Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas—whom each have “an Imperial Council Fire’ by themselves at their localities to transact their people’s affairs.” It further details the circumstances under which the Tuscaroras, Delawares, Tutelos and Nanticokes were enjoined into the Hodenosaunee. According to this account, the “Tutelos were entertained in the bosom of the Oneidas, and has two Chiefs, and they are not permitted to speak or to take part in the Confederate Council. And were clothed [in] Women’s Clothes, and the duty assigned to them is the same
as the Tuscaroras.” This duty assigned them “is, when the Confederate Lords [are] abroad, on their mission in behalf of the...[Tutelos] localities, they shall entertain the Confederate Lords in their Wigwam and give them corn bread and corn-soup with Bear’s meat in it.” Monture and Buck concluded that “all of the Four [Tuscarora, Delaware, Tutelo and Nanticoke] above mentioned Nations were in a destitute condition when they were sheltered under the spreading branches of the ‘Tree of the Great Peace’.”

The figurative reference “Clothed in Women’s Clothes” refers to the inability of the Tutelo pursuant to Iroquois decree to conduct sovereign warfare and thus symbolizes their dependent relationship to the *Hodenosaunee*. While this brief sketch of Tutelo history is sufficient to establish their place among the *Hodenosaunee* at the Six Nations Reserve, it does not begin to exhaust that history. Its purpose in this essay has been to largely supply an historical background sufficient to assess the ethnoliterary criticism of Chief Johns’ correspondence. Accordingly, it is appropriate that we turn to a review of Chief Johns’ four letters to Dr. Speck.

**Letters of Chief Samuel Johns to Dr. Frank G. Speck**

I

Chief Samuel Johns
Middlemass
Ontario Sept. 4/’34

My Dear Sir, Dr. Speck,

It is now some time ago, we met. Perhaps you have thought eh, that Sam Johns has forgotten me. But my dear bro.[ther], I or we have not forgotten you. We are talking about you and your visits to our people when they came to our home. My dear bro.[ther] it is though my rather severe illness, I keep putting off to write to you some nearly two months ago I got badly hurt by falling off my chair. But thanks God, I am now quiet smart again, though I am still lame perhaps its old age I’ll be 77yrs. old and I don’t think I’m an old man yet. Its my legs that give me trouble now for 3 years. I have not been able to do any work during that time. Sometimes I almost worry. My good wife does all the work she is 72 yrs. old and she [is] smart at that age. My only son living stays with us. I lost my youngest son 2 yrs. ago, who was my main support. Oh, I did mourn for him for a long time. But our heavenly Father comforted me by his precious word. Bless His Holy Name for ever and now dear bro.[ther] I [have] written a long letter [and] I only say further that all our people is
well.

Just a word more[,] do you know anything about the Tutelo Indians[?] I am of that breed my Father was a Tutelo Indian or he is a descen[dan]t of that tribe[.] Is there nothing in the Treaties about them[?] And do you know by history or otherwise is the Shawnees and the Munsees or Delawares one[?] [O]ur Head chief ask me to ask you[,] if you could give light on that and so. Now I remain ever your bro[ther].

Samuel Johns

II

Dec. 31st 1934

Delawares, Nanticokes and Tuteloes country lies along the western shores of the east branch of the Susquehanna River as shown on the map of the Province of Penn.[sylvania] contained in a volume “The Western Movement”

By

Justin Winsor

Houghton, Mifflin and Co.

New York 1897

(Public Library)

London, Ont.

III

Samuel Johns

Middlemass Jan 8/'35

Ontario

Dr. F. G. Speck

Most esteemed friend and bro[ther]. Greetings and Happy New year to you and yours and many of them. Pardon my delay to answer your very kind letter and many thanks for the token of your love to me. In this letter about the Tutelo Indian by three years ago I do not know anything about land left as I was too young and no [E]nglish language could I speak.[B]ut I do know as I often speak he [father] being a Tutelo Indian by his mother side and a Delaware on his father's side. He had an Indian name (Ka per josh), which means naughty and I go by that name and I do not
know of another who claims to be a Tutelo Indian. Well sir dear bro.[ther], I am glad to say I am quite well and [so is] my dear wife[,] I am Past 77 years and Mrs. John[s] Past 72. I am a cripple have been 4 yrs. not able to do any work. [A]s to your propose visit. Could it be possible for you to come in the balmy month of May[,] I think it would be better. [O]ur winter so far has been very mild not to much snow. I trust my letter will find you
& yours in the best of health so farewell for the time and a God Bless you is my Prayer.

Ever yours[,]  
Samuel Johns

IV

Samuel Johns  
Middlemass  
Ontario B412June 2/'35

My Dear Dr. Speck at last I found the letter I mislaid. I wrote to say or rather ask you can handle Bead work made by a Munsee lady and as to baskets[,] I'll get you some if you will tell one just the kind you want. We have real nice Summer weather just now. Oh say could you tell me just when you expect to visit us. We will have dinner ready for you[,] will of my place[,] will your dear son be with you. Is it late for me to write up a short history of our people be on this reserve. May be I can[,] I would try[,] Be sure [to] try a[nd] come here on or before 12 noon. [T]hen from my place we could go to our Hall to meet our people. 

I remain Sir your humble Bro.[ther],  
Samuel Johns
Although Speck gave considerable effort to recording Tutelo traditions, there remain, however, questions concerning his collaborative relationship with Native "informants." Describing this relationship, James Merrell, in his assessment of Speck’s Catawba studies, has explained the anthropologist’s approach.

Determined to rescue what he could of the Indians’ “native” or “original” culture using a “pack-rat technique,” Speck sought to add to the sparse documentary record by talking with the few surviving Indians who remembered the native language and “were in any degree capable of furnishing information on their cultural past....”

Within this characterization, there are cultural questions, which dominate the objectivity of anthropology. Addressing two of these cultural dimensions, Scott Michaelsen sets forth two characteristics of cultural consideration. First, there is the notion of “denominated ‘Indianness’,” which may be “understood as oral and/or collective,” when even so understood by those so denominated, this condition may, in fact, belong to hierarchical exclusions. “Culture is not a condition but, rather, a relation of power. And it is a political act of exclusion, part of colonial relations...to pass judgement on the ‘Indianness’ of tests.”

In the second case, there are two identity issues involved. Initially, there is the question of parameters establishing difference and sameness, as manifest in race, color, culture, and the like. Lastly, there is the everyday experience of culture. It is “the constant assertion in the world that one belongs to or partakes of a single (or multiple) culture.” It is from this perspective that we can assess Speck and his relationships with his “informants.”

Merrell has shown that Speck has been partially responsible for his own disappointment when lamenting “the decadent state of Catawba culture” and the “shattered traditions’ that he found in his Catawba studies.” As a point of contrast, in his early days among the Mohegans, Speck appears to have been well liked by the Elders. At one point, Speck, himself, experienced a Mohegan phantom, known as “the old stone cutter,” and related his experience to the Elders. This auto-ethnographical memorate subsequently became a narrative amid Mohegan oral tradition. In sharing the account, William Simmons has concluded “Speck strengthened his own standing among the people with whom he worked.” Gladys Tantaquidgeon attributed this respect among the Mohegan Elders to the idea that “his theories were in their formative stages.” Fawcett, her biographer, however, concludes that in the same experience, “Frank Speck forever misunderstood the true magic of Mohegan Hill.” It is, accordingly, difficult to evaluate Speck’s relation-
ship to his “informants” within the multicultural limits.

In their expression of warm friendship, graceful hospitality and thoughtful inquiry, these letters of Chief Samuel Johns constitute an intriguing example of Native collaboration with an anthropological scholar. The confidence and trust, moreover, that Chief Johns expresses for anthropologist Speck suggests a relationship that transcends anthropological indifference characteristic of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century objectivism. In this context, it is probable that Speck was able to go beyond a “simple location” sense of understanding as he learned from his “informants” who were in effect his collaborators. It was, therefore, a more humanistic collaboration between the scholar and the Native subject.

The John’s letters also stand out as a point of scholarly interest in Native ethnoliterary criticism. In writing Speck, Chief Johns reveals his Tutelo ancestry and makes an inquiry concerning that heritage. In a nearly forlorn tone, the old Chief requests the scholar to assist him in learning of his tribe’s lost history. As he does so, Johns, a Chief among the Ontario Cayuga, appears to lament his lost Tutelo identity, and thusly, he reveals an important consideration surrounding post-colonial American Indian ethnicity. It would seem that in Johns’ inquiry, race is not a mega-construct as in that of American Indian or Native American, or even Iroquois, but that there are significant concerns for one’s specific tribal origins. It is, moreover, not enough for Johns to be simply a citizen of the Six Nations Iroquois; he is a tribal descendant of the Tutelo.

First, in these letters, there is a sense of oral tradition in transition as oralcy begins to co-exist with literacy. “We are talking about you...” writes Johns in letter one, thereby implicating the oral tradition, however, not to be construed in the sense of gossip, this “talking about” reflects the ancient contest of reflection upon an important event or significant moment in community history. The letters are penned by Chief Johns, “old wife,” in a secondary language, English, with a choppy, inadequate grammar. This pattern suggest a transitional literary movement where English is acquiring a place within the family intellectual life, but not the sole place. Nonetheless, the letters have an oralcy about them characteristic of traditional Native intellectualism. In this regard, the reader experiences something of a liminal zone transiting worldviews, and as a result, this liminality creates a place where world views co-exist and overlap.

In letter four, Johns indicates that he had received a reply from Speck, but inadvertently mislaid it. This incident should not be construed as disinterest, but a product of the haphazards of marginal literacy. The example suggest, moreover, that the written word has not replaced the spoken word in the Johns’ household. Accordingly, the reference rein-
forces our conclusion that an oral narrative based worldview grounds Chief Johns’ thinking, which further suggests that his understanding of reality is quite different and distinct from that of the scholar, Dr. Speck.  

A second traditional Native measure that is evident from the letters is kindred based morality or kinship ethos that establishes mores and ethics defined by establishing bonds of kinship. In several cases, for example, Johns observes niceties designed to embrace Speck as a brother. In the opening address of the first letter, he salutes Speck with “My dear brother” and the letter concludes with “now I remain ever your brother.” These kinship-centered niceties are continued in letter three where Johns writes: “Most esteemed friend and brother,” while expressing regard for Speck’s family with “Greetings and Happy New Year to you and yours” in Holiday wishes. Again re-enforcing his tribal kinship mores, Johns concludes letter four with a declaration of humility and brotherhood, in the form of “humble brother.” These kinship mores and niceties suggest that Johns embraced Speck in the traditional sense where kinship dictates obligation and reciprocity in the Native moral universe. Furthermore, the practice of extending a kinship ethic to an outsider affirms the notion that Native people can systematically embrace the other, both human and non-human, in their value systems.  

By using the kinship mores, Johns as author, heightens the warmth of his correspondence and he draws the reader into the traditional world. As a result, the reader becomes responsive and sympathetic to the old man’s needs and interests. When Johns concludes in letter three with reference to his health, on might accuse him of playing on Speck’s sympathies, but the contradictory report of his being well and crippled in the same passage suggest that he has no such self-indulgent agenda. As we learn from the letter his crippled condition occurred from his having fallen off a chair, bone bruising injuries of this kind may well lead to weather sensitivity inducing pain that inhibits activity and range of motion particularly during cold, damp weather. His suggestion, therefore, that Speck visit “in the balmy month of May” hints foresight instead of self-indulgence and self-pity.  

Acknowledging beings and characteristics of the natural world is a central tenet to the Native kinship ethos. This practice is intimately tied to the notion that Joseph Epes Brown identified as a metaphysic of nature. Among Native Americans, moreover, the manifold array of natural forms and forces are metaphorically understood as messengers or agents and often known as spirits who “express most directly the Ultimate Power, or essence, of the Great Spirit.” While for most of the world, and here as well, niceties involving weather talk offer a compelling way to engage others. So in using a weather transition, in letter three, Johns seeks a
Native oriented shared and organic participation with Speck while affirming his sincere desire for the health and welfare of the anthropologist and his family. To the extent that he offers a divine prayer for these favored blessings, there is evidence of the Native metaphysic of nature. Chief Johns’ humanity is further affirmed in letter four when he references the nice summer weather, thereby, suggesting his active assistance with the anthropologist’s visit. His hospitable nature is likewise genuinely conveyed when he promises Speck dinner and inquires if his ‘dear son’ will be accompanying him.

In a third consideration, we may note that the letters also convey a sense of community and folk culture in comprising the Native worldview. Johns has a strong sense of self worth evidenced by his remark that at seventy-seven, he doesn’t think of himself as an old man, despite his illness from falling off a chair. Similarly he holds a healthy view of his wife at age seventy-two characterizing her as “smart at her age.” Here “smart” has the implied meanings of clever, nimble, well kept and quick-witted. These comments suggest a healthy attitude and outlook on life and the aging process. Even in his reflection upon loss, he is not beaten. Writing, moreover, of his eldest son who was the family’s main support and who died two years previous, John’s calls upon an acquired monotheistic belief that belies the ancient tradition of the animist’s “Great Mysterious” metaphysic of nature. In so doing, he accepts the world as process driven and seeks to put himself in accord with nature, albeit, referenced in this secondary monotheistic sense.

While the use of the English figurative expression, “balmy month of May,” may suggest an affectation appropriated from a foreign language, it may equally suggest an interpretative transition seeking to retain the intrinsic character of Native language and worldview in translation. Suggested, herein, is the notion that the figurative expression “balmy month of May” has been deliberately chosen by the interpreter because its translation conveys an original Native sentiment that is equivalent with the English sentiment for this spring season. Native worldview in itself is filled with signifiers that strike an accord with the natural world to insure power. Ruth Underhill referred to this practice as “sympathetic magic” whereby the natural referent in its organic properties exhibits the desired power when presented in an empathetic manner via song, dance and ritual. Power is thus organically revealed from natural process via sympathetic ritual association. This process is a theme that I associate with simile and experience so that through the use of an organic referent, such as a ritual fetish, its ecological properties are affected sympathetically and they evoke power that is itself organic and germane to the natural processes and forms surrounding us. The process is an
organicism where value rests in the natural form, force or element as referent. As a result, nature, nature-persons are taken seriously and respected for their ecological and organic association. Observing this sympathetic magic in Native myth and ritual, we may, accordingly, note a simile of association that reveals metaphorically deeper nature referents as organic valuations. When Johns invokes the English figuration, “balmy month of May,” he is nonetheless evoking the ecological simile of association that is encoded in expression whether English or Native. Since the Native worldview has traditionally retained such valuations, then it would naturally seek translations that convey equal meaning. It may be concluded, accordingly, that Johns is referencing a Native valuation of the spring season and its joyous and beneficial effects upon his traditional lifeways.

With revelations concerning Tutelo history, a fourth consideration emerges from the Johns letters as they disclose obscure tribal lore. When responding to Speck’s interest in Johns’ family history and the status of the Tutelo tribe, Johns reveals, in the third letter, that his father was a Tutelo by his mother and a Delaware by his father. Following traditional matrilineal custom, Johns’ father is Tutelo. It is, furthermore, clear that Samuel Johns constructs his mixed-blood identity within the confines of his father’s Tutelo heritage. In fact, Chief Johns reveals that his father’s Tutelo name was Ka per josh, which means naughty, and that he now uses this name. His sense of tribal identity is, consequently, Tutelo. Speck, however, reports “Sam John[s]s, a Munsee at Middlemass, Ontario.” Given, however, Johns’ claim on Tutelo identity, as well as, his chieftainship within the Cayuga who sponsored the Tutelo adoption into the Hodenosaunee, it is possible therefore that he held a Tutelo chieftainship within the Six Nations Council. This deduction is supported by Johns’ assertion to know of no others who claim to be Tutelo. Notwithstanding this supposition, we learned from Speck that John Buck held a Tutelo Chieftainship within the Six Nations Council; however, Hewitt’s explanation states that there were two Tutelo chiefs accorded the tribe. By inference of Grand River census records, it is apparent that the Tutelo were divided into two bands, a “Lower Tutelo band” and an “Upper Tutelo band,” thereby mimicking the Cayuga band divisions. It would appear, thus, that both John Tutela and John Key were Tutelo Council Chiefs in the Hodenosaunee and that their office passed to Samuel Johns, perhaps via his father, and John Buck, thereby continuing the Tutelo tribal sovereignty within the Iroquois League.

The letters of Samuel Johns, accordingly, invite historical research and discovery involving the Tutelo sovereignty within the Hodenosaunee. A review of Tutelo sovereign history begins with the Oneida viceroy
Shikellamy whose second wife, whom he married before October 1748, was Tutelo. While a husband gains no matriarchal authority via marriage, he does, nonetheless, have social and familial responsibilities to his wife’s people. As a result after October 1748, the Oneida viceroy Shichellamy was in a position to be a powerful advocate of the Tutelo and their tribal sovereignty within the Hodenosaunee. He, however, died before the Tutelo were admitted to the Iroquois League. Reported in Lt. Colonel Dearborn’s account of the destruction of Coreorgonel, we find a possibly obscure reference to Tutelo sovereignty when he records taking Chief Tegutleawana captive. Referenced as a near relation of the Cayuga “Sachem,” Chief Tegutleawana was made prisoner on 26 August 1779. Given the Chief’s residence at Coreorgonel, a Tutelo village, and the intriguing appearance of his name that suggests a corruption of Tutelo in hybrid with Cayuga Iroquois, we may herein have a reference to the Tutelo sovereign of that time.

Although he appears to confuse several individuals improperly merging them into one another, Speck supplies us with several examples that will further account for Tutelo sovereignty. He notes that Teká ku or Dikáku to denotes a chief’s name and is “said to belong to the Deer sib.” John Buck, in fact, understood Dikáku to denote “chief” in the Tutelo tongue. Informed by Chief John Buck, Speck reports a Tutelo Chief, Ohyogéwan, who died about 1830. Ohyogéwan was, no less, Buck’s paternal grandfather. His son, John Buck’s father, died about 1897 at the age of seventy-four. Given the longevity of many of the Tutelo, the life-span of Ohyogéwan may well have included the period at Coreorgonel and date to 1753 and the Tutelo adoption within the Hodenosaunee. The Buck lineage is, therefore, significantly identified with Tutelo sovereignty.

As noted earlier, “Old Mosquito,” Nikonha (Cayuga) or Wáskiteng (Tutelo) died about 1870, within a year of Hale’s visit. Speck records a “Nuyágō, old John Hoskins, who died about 1870 at an advanced age.” While the Cayuga Nikonha has an apparent cognate on the list of “Lower & Upper Tuteleys [Tutelos]” reported in Johnston for 1810-12, there is no similarly apparent cognate for Nuyágō, the name attributed to John Hoskins above. In consequence, John Hoskins, may well have been the Anglican name accorded the venerable “Old Mosquito,” Nikonha or Wáskiteng, who was, nonetheless, reported as the last surviving full-blood Tutelo.

As previously noted, an apparent contemporary of “Old Mosquito” was John Tutela or Gõhe, “Panther.” His role as a possible Tutelo sovereign has previously been addressed and his act of bequeathing a hickory staff, the Tutelo symbol of Chieftainship, to Canadian Inspector Dingham certainly suggests that he held a sovereign position for the Tutelo in the
Hodenosaunee. John Key, Nastabon, “One Step,” as reported earlier was another probable Tutelo sovereign, according with the Hodenosaunee acknowledgement of two Tutelo chiefs. Given Nastabon’s death in 1898 and Samuel Johns’ age of seventy-seven years when corresponding with Speck in 1934-35, then Johns’ (b. ca 1857) would certainly have been a younger contemporary of these Elders. Johns, furthermore, appears to have outlived Tutelo Chief, John Buck, who died in 1935 at age seventy-seven, thereby accounting for his knowledge of no other Tutelo leader. Accordingly while Samuel Johns’ position among the Cayuga may not have accounted wholly for the Tutelo authority among the Hodenosaunee, he was, given his ethnic identification as Tutelo and his standing as a chief at the time of Buck’s passing, a likely candidate for one of the two Tutelo Council Chiefs among the Iroquois. In fact, he may have been the last of the Tutelo sovereigns at Six Nations.

Despite the service of the two prominent Tutelo leaders, Nikonka or Waskiteng and Göhe or John Tutela, in the War of 1812, there was some objection to military service by at least one other Tutelo. In this controversy, the Six Nations Chiefs acted to sanction the protesters by petition.

The undersigned Chiefs of the Six Nations, observe with great Concern that Several Families who reside at the Grand River have acted in an Unbecoming manner towards their Great Father the King by endeavouring to discourage the Warriors and refusing themselves to fight the King’s enemies. Do therefore humbly recommend the Dr Supr Intendt General of Indian Affairs or the Person by him appointed for the distribution of presents; that the above mentioned Families are in their opinion Undeserving of His Majesty’s bounty. And the Undersigned Chiefs hope that those People may not receive presents of any description at the next distribution.  

In all one hundred five persons were sanctioned by the Six Nations Chiefs for leading dissension against military service in the War of 1812. Among those sanctioned, a Kayonaghahnorow of the Tutaleys [Tutelos] was singled out. While we have no indication of Kayonaghahnorow’s motive in this protest against Iroquois involvement with the war, it is a significant event suggesting that many Six Nations tribal members including some Tutelos were no longer interested in serving the Crown in its political suzerainty.

By the 1930s, Speck reports Tutelo descendants comprising eight families and numbering about sixty individuals. These families include: Peter Williams (four children), John Buck (thirteen children), Mrs. Sand-
ers (one child), Elizabeth Fish (four children), Joe Cranbette (a large family of children), Elisha Williams (four children), Mrs. Lucy Williams (Fish Carrier) (eight children). Other Tutelo descendants of mixed lineage were also listed among the Six Nations. Among them, Speck reports, a Mrs. James Hess who died June 21, 1938 at eighty-three years, and a “Mrs. Crawford, a Cayuga of the Turtle moiety, and herself of Tutelo descent.”

According to Speck, another member of the Crawford family named Skagwê died during the summer of 1934 in Missouri. Nekatcit, Speck’s Munsee-Mahican-Delaware informant, reported an additional man of Tutelo and Delaware ancestry named Wi’ctil who was a favorite leader of the Round Dance during the Delaware Big House Ceremonies. Subsequently reporting “Sam John[s],” as “a Munsee of Middlemass, Ontario,” Speck neglected to add his correspondent, a self-identified Tutelo, and his two sons, one of whom was deceased, to the report of Tutelo descendants. Documenting the Tutelo cultural persistence among the Six Nations in 1951, Marcel Rioux witnessed the tribe’s Spirit Adoption Ceremony upon “the death of George Williams, a member of the Onondaga tribe who had previously been adopted to replace a person of Tutelo descent.” Accordingly, Tutelo traditions remained vibrant as late as the 1950s, nearly twenty years after Speck’s correspondence with Chief Johns. It is furthermore apparent that Tutelo culture was still alive and vibrant when Speck and associates subsequently recorded their rituals.

When Chief Johns reveals his Tutelo tribal heritage to Speck, in letter one, he is most empathic imploring the scholar: “Is there nothing in the Treaties about them?” This inquiry implies that Johns had a political interest in his Tutelo heritage, which would benefit his status at Tutelo Chief. The fact that he reports his research findings concerning the Tutelo tribal homelands, in letter two, further suggests his interest in Tutelo sovereignty. While Johns, in letter four, declares that “it is too late for me to write up a short history of our people on this reserve,” he immediately recants suggesting that “maybe I can, I would try” to write this Grand River based Tutelo history. Hinted in these remarks are deep-seated interests in securing the Tutelo heritage that Johns seemed to hold as the responsible representative authority for the tribe at Grand River. A similar interest in past-tributary tribes within the Hodensaunee may have been evident when Johns requests, at the behest of the Head Chief, ethnological information regarding the Shawnees, Munsees, and Delawares. Like the Tutelo, these Algonquian tribes were alien to the
Iroquois and were all, as a result of conquest, historical tributaries of the Six Nations. In consequence, we may conclude that Chief Samuel Johns identified himself as Tutelo; that this identification was culturally relevant, that he held the Tutelo chieftainship among the Hodenosaunee, and that he sought to fulfill his responsibilities by securing Tutelo heritage, history and sovereignty at Grand River.

Evidencing a cultural heritage and a sovereign history, the Johns' letters are therefore significant to surviving Tutelo people who might seek to restore their voice within the Hodenosaunee and world affairs. Several important points regarding a Tutelo heritage are evident. First, identity is not mega-ethnic, as in Native, American Indian or Native American, or even Iroquoian. It is not enough for Johns to simply be a citizen of the Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve, he identifies himself tribally as born from his father's heritage. In letter three, Johns' father held the Tutelo name Ka per josh, naughty, which Speck rendered Kapedjac. Speck further reports that Johns informed him of the "Tutelo nickname Papacik, said to mean 'Devil'." As a descendant of the Indian people from the central Blue Ridge Mountains of Rockbridge and Amherst Counties, Virginia, I can recall the apparently similar term Piskey being used for the weak and sickly, as well as, an appellation for evil. Based upon his traditional matrilineal origins, Samuel Johns makes no such claim when assuming his father's role. This fact is significant since for the Tutelo to survive they must modify their rules of matrilineal inheritance and adapt a traditional cultural encoding such as Johns does who he takes his beloved father's name and place as Tutelo leader. Ethnic survival must be rooted in the genes, as well as, in cultural tradition, however, when the traditions restrict and limit the genetic descendants' their place in the tribes, then these customs must be questioned and re-evaluated if there is to be future tribal generations. By implication of his actions, Chief Johns helps us to see the way for securing the "seventh generation" that grounds the Hodenosaunee vision of the future.

Johns' regard and relationship with the anthropologist, Speck, is a final consideration that we may give the letters. When Johns wrote Speck declaring that "we are talking about you," it is clear that he is referencing an important community event and that Speck was the catalyst of it. Although Speck made field trips to the Six Nations Reserve in 1914 and 1925, he began his major research in 1932 and continued it through 1945. During this period, he recorded ceremonial traditions of the Munsee-Mahican-Delaware, the Tutelo and the Iroquois. Among his first collaborators at Six Nations, there was an old Delaware Elder named Nicodemous Peters or Nekatcit who privileged Speck with knowledge of the traditions of the Delaware Big House Ceremony. In a rich spir-
ritual moment, *Nekacit* explained the need to observe a period of silence and smoke before discussing the sacred traditions. After “just sitting and smoking” without conversation for about ten minutes, *Nekacit* commented:

> See our smoke has now filled the room, first it was in streaks and your smoke and my smoke mixed about that way, but now it is all mixed up into one. That is like our minds and spirits too, when we must talk. We are now ready, for we will understand one another better.⁷⁶

In reverently observing this ritual and the many others he encountered during his fieldwork, Speck earned a place of respect among the tribes and peoples of the Six Nations Reserve. It is this sense of respect that no doubt draws Chief Johns together with the scholar, Dr. Frank Speck.

It is, therefore, clear that Johns and the Grand River community held Dr. Speck in high regard. We may observe this conclusion through several comments that permeate the letters. By informing Speck that the people are well, for example, Johns is showing his respect for the anthropologist whom he believes by implications cares for the people beyond tacit academic interest. In letter three, Johns references Speck’s “very kind letter” and gives thanks for “the token of you love to me.” These niceties suggest his humanity while affirming the humanistic goodwill characteristic of Dr. Speck, the eminent anthropologist. When Johns introduces a new subject at the end of his first letter, specifically the Tutelo and other tribal ethnological inquiry, he opens the door for intellectual exchange with the scholar, Speck. Subsequently, Johns, in letter four, makes arrangements for Speck to meet the people at the tribal Hall with the provision that he arrived before noon. He also inquires about Speck’s interest in procuring Munsee beadwork and basketry offering to get such items if Speck will clarify his needs and desires. These actions merit notice that Johns is not simply an “informant,” as characterized in much of ethnological inquiry, but a partner and collaborator in Speck’s scholarly investigation. Speck’s standing among the Grand River tribes is one of mutual respect and worthy of honor.

In some final conclusions of general analysis, it behooves us to note that although Johns and the Tutelo are the victims of tribal and cultural genocide, there is no rancor or bitterness in his letters. We see little disillusionment from Johns. He exhibits a sense of hope, although, at times somewhat forlorn, and he remains hopeful and willing when seeking knowledge of his ancestors as well as resolution to Tutelo sovereignty. Johns is a beacon of warmth whose cooperative learning is evident in openly sharing interests and wisdom with the respected anthropologist. In this regard, I am reminded of some of the remarkable old
Elders with whom I have had the good fortune to associate with over the years. Such Elders in their kindness, sincerity and honesty are heart warming, exhibiting the best manners and customs that the Native traditions ensconce. When contrasted with some of the modern young people who sometimes exhibit an open bitterness, hostility and offensive rancor to anyone who wishes to learn and respect Native traditional wisdom, there is an extraordinary merit evident in the old ways that move the traditional Elders.

The Johns’ letters evoke a warm feeling in the reader. They are filled with traditional Native honesty, warmth and sincerity; so much so, the reader is made secure in the sense of a grandfather or a grandmother kindly disposed to him or her. This outcome is a deep manifestation of the Native kinship ethos and we, as students, scholars and Natives, would do well to honor such esteemable wisdom.

References

1. The letters of Chief Samuel Johns to Dr. Frank G. Speck are available in the Frank G. Speck papers, archived at the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.
   James Mooney, The Siouan Tribes of the East, U. S. Bureau of Ameri-
can Ethnology, Bulletin No. 22, Smithsonian Institution. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984: 23-55; and Peter W. Houck, M.D., *Indian Island in Amherst County*. Lynchburg: Lynchburg Historical Research Co., 1984: 17. These three Eastern Siouan confederacies, the Monacan Nation, included: (1) the Monacan Confederacy identified as including the Monacan, Meiponsky, Mahoc, Nunaneuck or Nuntily, and Mohetan or Moneton; (2) the Tutelo or Nahyssan confederacy comprising the Yesang or Tutelo, Saponi, and Occanichi or Occanechei; and (3) the Manahoac confederacy containing the Hassinnungas, Manahoac, Outponeas, Stegarake, Shakakoni, Tauxitonia, Tegninateos, and Whonkenteas.

15. H. R. McIlwaine, editor, *Executive Journal of the Council of Colonial Virginia*. Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1928: v. III: 450-452 referencing the August 1717 attack upon the Catawba Indians outside Fort Christanna perpetrated by the Iroquois who declared that they did not know these people, the Catawba, were friends with the English.
20. Charles A. Hanna, The Wilderness Trail [1911] 2 volumes. Lewisburg, PA: Wennawoods Pub., 1995, 1: 313 explains that in Algonquian languages, such as Delaware and Shawnee, the “r” sound is very rare and seldom used, and conversely the Seneca language, has no sound for the letter “l.” Siouan tribes of Virginia and the Carolinas were accordingly known as “Totero” among the Iroquoians and “Tutelo” among the Algonquians.
21. Hale, “Tutelo Tribe,” 11. In deference to this long-standing error of tribal nomenclature, I will continue to use the confederate Tutelo reference for the Nahyssan alliance.
23. Mooney, Siouan Tribes, 50 citing a casual French reference that puts the Saponi and the Tutelo in the south in 1736, he concludes that the removal of the Nahyssans northward cannot have been before 1740. Claude E. Schaeffer, “Introduction: The Tutelo Indians in Pennsylvania History,” in Frank G. Speck, The Tutelo Spirit Adoption Ceremony: Reclothing the Living in the Name of the Dead. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1942: xi reports that the “...Tutelo-Saponi migration into Pennsylvania apparently did not take place until around 1740. That they were still located in the south in 1733 is indicated by the fact that the Conoys took Tutelo scalps in that year (PA. Col. Rec., III, 511); while a subsequent French reference shows their presence there as late as 1736 (Mooney, Siouan Tribes, 50). The removal from Virginia and North Carolina represented today by the Saponi-Monacan in Rockbridge and Amherst Counties, Virginia, the Occaneechis near Hillsboro, North Carolina, and the Halawa Saponi also in North Carolina.


32. *Brantford Weekly Expositor*, March 28, 1888: 6; referencing Hale, “Tutelo Tribe,” 9-10, Speck, *Tutelo Spirit Adoption Ceremony*, 121 seems to have confused these Tutelo Elders, Nikonha, with his Tutelo name Washikeng, and John Tutela. He mistakenly labels “John Tuteli” as “Old Mosquito’ who died about 1870 at about 105 years of age” and merges the two men under the Tutelo name Wáskiteng. Speck further notes that Göhe may be compared with Cayuga, Gahe, “panther.”


34. Speck, *Tutelo Spirit Adoption Ceremony*, 121.


38. The letters of Chief Samuel Johns to Dr. Frank Speck, Frank G. Speck Papers, Library of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia. The Johns’ letters are published here without alteration, although, minimally edited using brackets to qualify punctuation and grammar.


42. Michaelsen, Limits of Multiculturalism, xxii.


58. In Fall 1999, Six Nations Chief Stanley Buck presided over the oneida re-dedication of Chief Skennandoah’s grave at Hamilton College, Clinton, New York. In a brief afterlude, we discussed some of these Tutelo considerations of his family. Author’s personal experience.
70. Speck, *Tutelo Spirit Adoption Ceremony*, 121; see also Oliverio, *A grammar and Dictionary of Tutelo*, 212.
72. This term, *Piskey*, was widely in use by my grandparents and my father who wrote it down before his death in 1998. Author’s personal experience and notes.
75. Speck with Moses, *Celestial Bear*, xii.
76. Speck with Moses, *Celestial Bear*, xiii.