

“A most industrious and far-seeing Mohawk scholar” Charles A. Cooke (Thawennensere), Civil Servant, Amateur Anthropologist, Performer, and Writer

Brendan F.R. Edwards

Volume 102, Number 1, Spring 2010

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065599ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065599ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)
2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Edwards, B. F. (2010). “A most industrious and far-seeing Mohawk scholar”:
Charles A. Cooke (Thawennensere), Civil Servant, Amateur Anthropologist,
Performer, and Writer. *Ontario History*, 102(1), 81–108.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1065599ar>

Article abstract

Charles Angus Cooke (Thawennensere) (1870-1958) was an Aboriginal artist and writer and a federal civil servant who, by attempting to establish a library and publish a Mohawk newspaper and dictionary, and by his recruitment of Native people into the educational and political realm of the Department of Indian Affairs. Cooke sought to redefine the Western medium of the printed word for the social, cultural and political benefit of Aboriginal peoples, without compromising Aboriginal cultural interests and beliefs. He was motivated by a sincere interest in protecting, strengthening, and promoting Aboriginal languages, histories, and cultural practices, and desire to create an environment where Aboriginal people could make meaningful contributions to Canadian political affairs.

“A most industrious and far-seeing Mohawk scholar”

Charles A. Cooke (Thawennensere), Civil Servant,
Amateur Anthropologist, Performer, and Writer

by Brendan F.R. Edwards

To the short list of native Iroquois scholars—J.N.B. Hewitt and A.C. Parker—must now be added the name of Charles A. Cooke....¹

-Marius Barbeau

Introduction and Family History

Although he did not learn English until the age of 12, Charles Angus Cooke (Thawennensere) (1870-1958), was one of the first Aboriginal peoples to work for the Federal Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa. Hired in March, 1893, Cooke worked for the department as a writer, clerk, translator, interpreter and document classifier, until his retirement in 1926.² Cooke was born Thawennensere or Da-ha-wen-nen-se-re,

at Kanehsatake, Quebec on 22 March, 1870, to Adonhgnundagwen (later Angus Cooke) and Thiweza (Katrine). He attended the Methodist Mission school at nearby Oka and worked with his father on the family farm until the family moved in 1881 to the Muskoka area of Ontario. Cooke's family was one of a group of Protestant Mohawks who left Kanehsatake in 1881, relocating to Gibson (Wahta), near Gravenhurst, Ontario.³ It was here that Angus Cooke was engaged by the Methodist Missionary Society to preach at the Gibson Reserve. Charles was sent to the

¹ Marius Barbeau, “Charles A. Cooke, Mohawk Scholar” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 96.4 (1952), 424. [hereafter Barbeau].

² Library and Archives Canada, RG 10, Volume 2675, File 135480, Reel C-11261, Headquarters - Ottawa - Personnel file on extra clerks working for the Department of Indian Affairs, 1893-1897; Barbeau, 424-26. The Department's *Annual Report* between 1897 and 1899 lists Cooke as a “writer,” employed since 1 March 1893, with an annual salary between \$425 and \$475. In 1901, the *Annual Report* lists him, for the first time, as a “Junior Second Class Clerk,” with a salary of \$600 per year. See: Canada. Library and Archives Canada. *Indian Affairs Annual Reports: 1864-1990*. 22 May 2007. 21 January 2008, <<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/indianaffairs/>>.

³ Cooke wrote about the experience of the Iroquois who left Oka for Gibson in October, 1881, in a letter, which his granddaughter, Nona Argue, kept and published as “Dear Friends of the Gibson Reserve: recalling troubled times in Oka 113 years ago” in the Ottawa *Citizen*, 26 July 1990 [p. A15].

Abstract

Charles Angus Cooke (Thawennensere) (1870-1958) was an Aboriginal artist and writer and a federal civil servant who, by attempting to establish a library and publish a Mohawk newspaper and dictionary, and by his recruitment of Native soldiers in World War I, tried to bring the knowledge and ideas of Native people into the educational and political realm of the Department of Indian Affairs. Cooke sought to redefine the Western medium of the printed word for the social, cultural and political benefit of Aboriginal peoples, without compromising Aboriginal cultural interests and beliefs. He was motivated by a sincere interest in protecting, strengthening, and promoting Aboriginal languages, histories, and cultural practices, and desire to create an environment where Aboriginal people could make meaningful contributions to Canadian political affairs.

Résumé: *Charles Angus Cooke (Thawennensere), qui vécut de 1870 à 1958, était un artiste et un écrivain autochtone. Employé par le gouvernement fédéral, il s'efforça d'introduire au sein du Département des Affaires Indiennes, le savoir et les idées des Autochtones, notamment dans les domaines de l'éducation et de la politique. Il essaya ainsi de constituer une bibliothèque et de publier un dictionnaire et un journal en langue Mohawk. Il s'attacha également à faciliter le recrutement de soldats autochtones lors de la première guerre mondiale. Cooke cherchait notamment à mettre l'imprimé, un moyen de communication occidentale, au service des autochtones, d'en faire pour eux un outil de progrès aussi bien social, que culturel ou politique. Ce qui animait son action, c'était le désir sincère de protéger, renforcer et promouvoir les langues, les récits et les pratiques culturelles autochtones, et de créer un environnement qui permettrait aux peuples autochtones d'apporter une contribution significative à la vie politique canadienne.*

Mount Elgin residential school at Munsee, Ontario amongst children of Algonkian decent, but failing to learn proper English, he later attended a public school at Gravenhurst, Ontario. Prior to working for the Department of Indian Affairs, Cooke was employed by the Methodist Missionary Society as a teacher on the

Gibson Reserve, and worked for the Georgian Bay Lumber Company as a clerk. Upon his graduation from high school, Cooke intended to study medicine at McGill University, but was instead persuaded to take a position with Indian Affairs by the federal Member of Parliament for his district, Colonel William Edward O'Brien, a friend of his father.

Cooke's true lineage, however, was mixed Ojibwa and Iroquois, as his grandfather, Showandai, was a member of the Dokis Band in the Nippissing-French River area of Ontario. Nonetheless, Cooke was raised Mohawk, and although he was never recognised under the Indian Act as a member of any Band he publicly identified, for the most part, with the Iroquois side of his lineage. Between 1911 and 1926, Cooke tried hard to make a case for recognition under the Indian Act as a member of the Dokis First Nation. Although he

submitted sufficient evidence to prove that his grandfather, Showandai, was a recognised member of the Dokis community, Cooke's application was nevertheless turned down, likely due to the financial burden attached to the Department of Indian Affairs. The Dokis Band also refused his claim, fearful of losing

much needed federal funding. Cooke demonstrated through affidavits and official documents that Showandai left Nipissing on the solicitation of the Seminary of St. Sulpice missionary order to join other Indians from across Canada at their Oka Mission settlement in Quebec. At Oka he met and married a widow, Marie Skonwaieren, Cooke's grandmother, and fathered a child (Ignace Kaniotakwen, Cooke's father). However, Showandai left Oka in 1847, abandoning his wife and child, and returned to Dokis, where he reportedly passed away. Marie Skonwaieren remarried a third time to an Iroquois with the surname, Cooke. Charles' father was raised by this man and took the name Angus Cooke. Angus Cooke was never admitted into the Kanasatake Mohawk (Oka) Band or the Wahta Mohawk (Gibson) Band as required by the provisions of the Indian Act, therefore Charles was also never a recognised member of either Band. In the decade following 1911, Charles Cooke experienced financial difficulty and the unfortunate illness and death of his first wife. Under such pressures, Cooke felt compelled to apply for official membership to the Dokis Band as

the only remaining descendant of Showandai. His lack of Band status meant that Charles Cooke, and his descendants, were never recognised as having Indian Status under the Indian Act.⁴

During his tenure as an employee of the Department of Indian Affairs, Cooke was a key figure in the establishment of the Department's library, compiling a "Comparative and Synoptical Indian Dictionary," publishing a newspaper in the Mohawk language, and in recruiting First Peoples from reserves throughout Ontario and Quebec to enlist for service in the First World War. Following his retirement from the civil service, Cooke was a popular lecturer and recitalist from 1926 to 1934, touring eastern Canada and the United States, reciting Iroquoian and Huron lore, songs and dances. When he was in his eighties, Cooke joined the National Museum of Canada, working with Marcel Rioux and Marius Barbeau in 1949 and 1951 in surveying and completing a grammatical study of Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Tuscarora. And in 1950, Cooke assisted the film director Allan Wargon in making and acting in a film representation of the life and reli-

⁴ Details of Cooke's efforts to be recognised as a member of the Dokis Band are found in papers held in the Cooke Family Papers (currently in the care of Graham Cooke, Charles' grandson, in Edmonton). A perplexing discrepancy presents itself, however, when we read a brief family history Charles wrote, circa 1958. In that history, on which the contemporary Cooke family has based their family tree, there is no mention of Showandai, with Charles' grandfather reportedly being Jhi se re gen. Further complicating this story is the admission that Jhi se re gen was born on the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario. Jhi se re gen (or Charles Bearfoot, later Cooke) raised Charles' father, Angus, and perhaps due to the fact that Charles' application to be recognised as a member of the Dokis First Nation was turned down, he felt there was little reason to mention his biological grandfather in this short family history. Raised as an Iroquois, Charles' father, Angus, probably had little or no notion of his Ojibway heritage. Charles' grandmother (Angus' mother), Marie Skonwaieren, was reportedly of French birth, but was legally adopted (with her sister) by an Iroquois family at Oka, by whom she was raised. Charles Cooke's Iroquois/Mohawk ancestry, therefore, comes only through his Mother, Thiweza (of the Bear Clan), whom Angus married and fathered seven children.

gious activities of the Iroquois Six Nations in Ontario, which resulted in *La Grande Maison*, or the *Longhouse people*, released by the National Film Board of Canada in 1951.⁵

The Civil Servant and Duncan Campbell Scott

As an employee of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1893 to 1926, Cooke's career coincided with that of Duncan Campbell Scott.⁶ Now notoriously associated with his administration of Indian Affairs, Scott was during his lifetime (1862-1947) widely celebrated as one of Canada's Confederation Poets. Although Scott felt he was critically neglected as a poet, his literary reputation has been solid since roughly 1900, with his work appearing in virtually all major anthologies of Canadian poetry.⁷ In 1921-22 Scott served as President of the

Royal Society of Canada and in 1922 was awarded the very first honorary D. Litt. by the University of Toronto.⁸ Scott's day job, as a leading administrator and architect of policy at Indian Affairs, however, has perhaps come to define the man more than his poetry. His tenure as Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs was a turbulent one, characterised by a paternal and narrow approach to administering affairs relating to Aboriginal health, education, and welfare. Rather ironically, much of his poetry was related to "Indians." Drawing on his experience as an Indian administrator in the field, Scott expressed sensibilities as a poet saddened by the perceived waning of ancient Aboriginal culture (i.e. the "vanishing Indian"). Yet in his administrative work, Scott actively sought to assimilate Indians into the Canadian mainstream, effectively quickening the pace of the demise he felt

⁵ For additional biographical details, see: Barbeau 424-46; Brendan Frederick R. Edwards, *Paper Talk: a history of libraries, print culture, and Aboriginal peoples in Canada before 1960* (Lanham MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 89-101. Included in the Cooke family papers, held by Cooke's grandson, Graham, in Edmonton, is a brief family history written by Charles Cooke which explains, among other things, how the family came to have the English name "Cooke."

⁶ For more on Duncan Campbell Scott as an administrator of Indian Affairs, see E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1986).

⁷ For more on Scott's literary achievement, see: Stan Dragland, ed., *Duncan Campbell Scott: a book of criticism* (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1974); Dragland, *Floating Voice: Duncan Campbell Scott and the literature of Treaty 9* (Concord ON: Anansi, 1994); Gordon Johnston, *Duncan Campbell Scott and his works* (Downsview ON: ECW Press, 1983); R.L. McDougall, "Scott, Duncan Campbell" *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1999), 2121.

⁸ For more on Scott's literary career in relation to his activities as a senior member of the Department of Indian Affairs, see, for example: D.M.R. Bentley, "Shadows in the Soul: racial haunting in the poetry of Duncan Campbell Scott" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75:2 (2006), 752-70; Dragland, *Floating Voice*; Gerald Lynch, "An Endless Flow: D.C. Scott's Indian poems" *Studies in Canadian Literature* 7:1 (1982), 27-54; Lisa Salem-Wiseman, "'Verily, the white man's ways were the best': Duncan Campbell Scott, Native culture and assimilation" *Studies in Canadian Literature* 21:2 (1996), 120-42; E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 23-36; and L.P. Weis, "D.C. Scott's View of History and the Indians" *Canadian Literature* 111 (1986), 27-40.

was so imminent. Perhaps this was a strategy on Scott's part. If he could render the idea of Indians firmly to the past through his work as an administrator in Indian Affairs, then perhaps his Indian poetry would be taken more seriously. In all likelihood, however, Scott truly believed that the only "authentic" Indian was a pre-contact Indian. In other words, Scott perceived the Indian of the past as a "noble savage," and the Indian of the present as merely an inhibitor of progress.

Scott's behaviour as a popular and critically acclaimed poet, who was at the same time an important administrator in Indian Affairs, is often puzzling. Reconciling Scott's Indian poetry, where Aboriginal people are portrayed as "attractive and apparently humane,"⁹ with the dreadful and sorry legacy of his administration of Indian Affairs is challenging. The primary appeal of Scott's poetry was his portrayal of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, and as Stan Dragland has noted, "the very authenticity that makes those poems and stories so appealing was bought at the expense of Native people themselves."¹⁰ Scott was not writing his Indian poetry from a position of removal, "he saw with his own eyes what they

looked like, where and how they lived..., and this experience removed a veil of illusion that debilitated virtually all white writing about Canadian Natives up until



Charles A. Cooke in his Indian costume, which he wore as a recitalist and entertainer between 1924 and 1932 (Cooke Family Papers, Edmonton).

Scott's time, and much of it after."¹¹ The Indians of Scott's poetry are neither noble nor savage, but are rather the "physical and emotional casualties of European contact."¹² But while his poetry may have shown some sympathy towards the plight of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, in the everyday practice of his duties as a leading administrator of Indian Affairs, Scott showed little compas-

sion or sympathy towards the people he considered to be mere wards of the state. Scott was a tireless administrator, determined to achieve his Department's goal of ultimate assimilation of all Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Lisa Salem-Wiseman asserts that Scott's poetry reflected his belief that Aboriginal cultures were obsolete, something of the past, and that the only way Indians could hope to survive was to relinquish their cultural beliefs and practices in favour of adopting the ideologies and practices of Euro-Canada.¹³ One of Scott's biographers, E. Brian Titley, quotes the

⁹ Dragland, *Duncan Campbell Scott* 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³ Salem-Wiseman, "Verily," 120.

administrator-author as referring to Indians as a “weird and waning race.”¹⁴ As Deputy-Superintendent of Indian Affairs (the title by which the permanent head or chief civil servant of the department was known between 1862 and 1936), Scott considered himself responsible for pushing Aboriginal peoples toward “civilisation”; meanwhile, his poetry and writing revealed sympathy and compassion toward the passing of the Indian.

Salem-Wiseman encourages contemporary readers of Scott’s poetry and writing to avoid dismissing his work and judging the poet as a hypocritical racist, and instead asks the modern reader to “understand more fully his attitude toward the Native people who figured so prominently in both his ‘outer’ life at the Department of Indian Affairs and his more private ‘inner’ life as expressed in his poetry and short fiction.” After all, she says, it was a common belief among Euro-Canadians of the early twentieth century that “in order for Native people to survive as individuals, all things that made their culture unique and distinct from other Canadians had to be destroyed.”¹⁵

But inherently, Scott also had a very personal and perhaps selfish reason to dispose of the Indian of old. His status and success as a poet and writer was directly reliant on the success of his policies as an Indian administrator. If the “Indian

problem” could be solved, by assimilating all Indians into contemporary Euro-Canadian culture, then the romantic, sympathetic sentiments Scott expressed in his poetry would become more valid and thus hold a wider historical and popular appeal. In this way, Scott’s double life as a poet and government administrator was intimately linked. It is perhaps ultimately due to the failure of Scott’s administrative efforts (i.e. Aboriginal people still exist and exert their cultural and linguistic differences) that explains why Scott is all but unknown as a poet and writer today. Although he was widely known and respected as a literary figure in his lifetime, students of Canadian literature in the early twenty-first century have scarcely heard of Scott the writer, never mind actually read or critiqued his work. Like his ideas with regards to Indian policy, Scott’s literary output is now considered antiquated. Despite Scott’s heavy hand, Cooke managed to make some impact as an Aboriginal person working from the inside. Cooke family memory positions Charles as “barely tolerant” of Duncan Campbell Scott.¹⁶

In the same year as his hiring, Scott, who was then the Chief Accountant at Indian Affairs, announced the commencement of “the organisation of a library in connection with [the] Dept.”¹⁷ Cooke would have no small involvement

¹⁴ Titley, *A Narrow Vision*, 31. See also: Keiichi Hirano, “The Aborigine in Canadian Literature,” *Canadian Literature* 14 (1962), 43-52.

¹⁵ Salem-Wiseman, “Verily,” 120-42.

¹⁶ Nona Argue (Granddaughter of Charles A. Cooke). Personal Correspondence. 19 November 2002.

¹⁷ RG 10, Volume 2740, File 145131, Reel C-11273, Extract from Dept. letter of 26 Dec. 1893 to W. J. McGee, Esq., Ethnologist in charge, Bureau of Ethnology, Washington.

with matters relating to the departmental library throughout his career. Cooke's involvement with the Department included efforts to better organise the library, manage its records, and effectively collect works relating to First Peoples in Canada (and their languages) for the research uses of departmental employees and Aboriginal peoples alike. While the Department in general was around this time recognising the benefits of effectively collecting and organising its records,¹⁸ Cooke's efforts stand out as an attempt to bring the knowledge and ideas of Aboriginal people into the educational and political realm of Indian Affairs and illustrate an instance of Aboriginal articulation and integration of the Western form of information and knowledge preservation and literacy. Cooke was certainly not unique in the fact that he was an Aboriginal person working for the Federal Department of Indian Affairs. The *Sudbury Journal* reported in May, 1901, that "two other Mo-

hawk Indians, Miss Maracle and Joseph Delisle" were employed in the same room as Cooke.¹⁹ Historian Douglas Leighton has noted that the Department of Indian Affairs recruited a number of Aboriginal employees in the nineteenth century, mainly as interpreters, clerks, and timber rangers. But while the Department hired many, few were in any position to influence the formulation of policy.²⁰ Cooke's significance lies in the fact that although he was largely unsuccessful, he attempted to influence policy decisions at Indian Affairs through his library, newspaper, and dictionary projects, as well as through his role as a military recruitment officer during the First World War.

The Civil Servant and Indian Enfranchisement

In large part due to his Aboriginal status, Cooke was regularly approached by Aboriginal peoples seeking his assistance and influence in their dealings with

¹⁸ G. M. Matheson, the Registrar for Indian Affairs and Head Clerk, Records Branch between 1888 and 1936, and other departmental personnel, were for instance during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, working towards creating a series of subject indexes to provide subject access to records relating to Indian Affairs (both those in the department custody and elsewhere). It does not appear, however, that Matheson had anything to do with the establishment and organizing of the Indian Affairs departmental library.

¹⁹ "A Paper for the Mohawks: the new weekly will be printed in their own tongue." *Sudbury Journal* (30 May, 1901), 1. Cooke's presence and reputation as an Aboriginal employee of note in the Department is confirmed in Alanis Obomsawin's 1977 film, *Mother of Many Children*. In that film, Alice Wawanolet (Abenakis) from Odanak, Quebec, speaks of Cooke when she says, "There was an Indian man working there, he was from Gibson Reserve, but I was the first Indian girl to ever work in Indian Affairs." Wawanolet claims to have been hired by the Department in April, 1913, but her assertion that she was the "first Indian girl" to be employed by Indian Affairs is contradicted by the aforementioned report in the *Sudbury Journal*. See: *Mother of Many Children*. Alanis Obomsawin, Director (1977; Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1991).

²⁰ Douglas Leighton, "The Compact Tory as Bureaucrat: Samuel Peters Jarvis and the Indian Department, 1837-1845." *Ontario History* LXXIII:1 (1981), 40-53. See also: Leighton, *The Development of Federal Indian Policy in Canada, 1840-1890*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1975, 66-67.

the department. One notable example lies in the efforts of Thomas Laforce, who in 1925 actively sought enfranchisement. Laforce wrote to Cooke, "Now Charlie, you know me pretty well. I am always amongst the white-people and making an honest living and I have good reputation among the white-people. And tell the Department that I fought for my country for freedom. And now all I am asking the Department is to grant me our enfranchisement. I need the money and I would like to have as soon as possible. I am ambitious and I believe in an education and a future."²¹ Seeking to be granted the Band monies entitled to him in a lump sum upon enfranchising, Laforce explained to Cooke that he endeavoured to use the money to pay the costs of tuition, as he was enrolled to study as an electrician. Laforce's efforts in seeking enfranchisement were not entirely uncommon. Although only a very small minority of Aboriginal peoples actively and willingly sought to be enfranchised under section 122A of the 1918 Indian Act, Laforce's reasoning, that he wished to use the monies available to him for education, was common. Enfranchisement effectively removed the Indian status of an Aboriginal person under the Indian Act, and gave them the full rights of Canadian citizenship. Laforce, formerly of the Gibson reserve, was at the time of his application, living in Waterford, Ontario, and he sought to study

in Chicago, Illinois. Thus removed from his home community, Laforce likely saw the benefits of enfranchisement (at least financially) as outweighing the benefits of retaining his Indian status and Band membership. For Indians like Laforce, enfranchisement was not a cultural choice, but an economic one.²² Cooke's efforts in helping Laforce seek enfranchisement were neither supportive nor discouraging, but decidedly non-committal. It appears as though Cooke was merely helping out a fellow Indian. At the heart of Laforce's desire to be enfranchised was a motivation to gain an education and better himself. As a successful Indian without status himself, one can hardly blame Cooke for offering some kind of assistance in this matter. The fact that he did so, without any apparent judgement, speaks to the level of professionalism with which he approached his job.

At the House of Commons Special Committee hearings to consider Bill 14 (in relation to involuntary enfranchisement) in 1920, both Charles Cooke and Andrew Paull (the well known Squamish political leader, sportsman, and journalist) were present and submitted evidence. It is clear from the transcripts of these hearings that Paull and Cooke had previously never met each other, and their views were in conflict. Cooke insisted that he was "giving evidence as a private Indian," and that his "connection with ... [the

²¹ RG 10, Volume 7230, File 8022-9, T. Laforce to Cooke, 16 November 1925.

²² See: Robin Jarvis Brownlie, "A Better Citizen than lots of White Men': First Nations enfranchisement—an Ontario case study, 1918-1940" *Canadian Historical Review* 87:1 (March 2006), 29-52. Thomas Laforce later applied to have his status reinstated, giving many of the same reasons he had expressed in arguing to be enfranchised in the first place (financial). See: RG 10, Volume 7230, File 8022-9, Parry Sound Agency—Enfranchisement, Laforce T.

Department of Indian Affairs had] nothing to do with” his opinions, yet he stated that he had “no objection” to the idea of enfranchisement, and even endorsed it as a potential tool of “progress.”²³ Andrew Paull confronted Cooke on his seeming minority Indian point-of-view, wondering aloud if Cooke’s opinion could have been influenced by his employment at Indian Affairs, and stating “I do not think you have met the Indians of British Columbia,” noting their apparent disapproval of involuntary enfranchisement.

Although Cooke’s apparent support of the idea of enfranchisement is upon first reading highly confusing, it is significant to note that when questioned about why he had not become enfranchised himself, Cooke responded, “I have never thought of taking out enfranchisement, and another reason why I have not is because I enjoy the full privileges as a Canadian citizen by reason of the fact that I own property outside of the Indian Reserve, and therefore I have the same privileges as any other national who comes into this country,” continuing, “and I have voted in every election, federal and otherwise in Ottawa.”²⁴ Further, in relation to his own status, Cooke said “I belong to the Gibson band,” and later, “I certainly have interests in the Gibson reserve.” In reality, however, Cooke did not have status as an Indian. Although he considered himself an Indian “in every sense of the word,” he in fact had no

status to lose, and therefore could not be enfranchised. Furthermore, he did not envision enfranchisement as in any way endangering Indian identity, suggesting that enfranchised Indians could stay on-reserve and take “an active and respected part in the tribal affairs of that reserve.” Cooke cites examples of Indians, whom he claimed were enfranchised, and had found such positive situations on their reserves, including one George Thompson of the Sucker Creek Reserve on Manitoulin Island and Alexander Aikins (whose Reserve community is not mentioned). As Cooke states, “These are cases where enfranchisement has taken place, and the Indian has taken his stand, and demonstrated to the world what he can do if he is put upon his own reserve and given an opportunity to show his ability as a citizen of this country.”

From this reader’s point-of-view, Cooke viewed enfranchisement as potentially positive because he felt it could provide a means whereby the lives and social status of Indians could be improved. By improving themselves, he in turn hoped that non-Aboriginal Canadians would show all Indians greater respect (he cited an instance from his own experience where despite his status as a government employee, he was denied a room at a hotel in Penetanguishene, Ontario on the grounds that he was an Indian). In addition to this hope, we must remember that Cooke’s boss, Duncan Campbell

²³ Library and Archives Canada. RG 14 D-1, Volume 666, Appendix No. 3 (pt. 2), Reel T-14571. Proceedings, House of Commons Special Committee to Consider Bill 14 to Amend the Indian Act (April, 1920).

²⁴ LAC. RG 14 D-1, Volume 666, Appendix No. 3 (pt. 2), Reel T-14571. Proceedings, House of Commons Special Committee to Consider Bill 14 to Amend the Indian Act (April, 1920).

Scott, was sitting right next to him during the course of these hearings. How much these hearings provide evidence of Cooke's own thoughts is therefore difficult to judge. Even his voluntary participation in these hearings is not certain, for it is well known that Duncan Campbell Scott wielded considerable power and influence within the Department. Cooke may have been expressing such opinions in concern for his job.

Cooke, the Aspiring Writer and Librarian

Although his literary output was moderate, his efforts and ideas are nonetheless significant.²⁵ Like Johnson, who was a turn-of-the-century Mohawk contemporary, Cooke was to a lesser extent an Aboriginal artist and writer who sought to participate in the post-Confederation process of writing, constructing, and imagining twentieth-century Canada. From a postcolonial standpoint, as a civil servant and aspiring writer Cooke was self-consciously working to reclaim the cultural and social territory subordinated and occupied by Canadians of European descent. Cooke's audience was simultaneously Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian. Like Johnson's, his was a national-

ist identity that sought to denounce oppression and incorporate the histories and knowledge of First Peoples into the larger Canadian social and cultural fabric.²⁶

In January, 1904, Cooke wrote to Clifford Sifton, Canadian Minister of the Interior and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, suggesting that the Indian Affairs department should properly organise its collection of books, accept contributions from Aboriginal people, and provide free and open circulation of its materials to members of the Department and status Indians. In addition to his duties as a records clerk, Cooke was compiling a history of Aboriginal cultures and languages, and he thought Indian Affairs ought to be collecting literature and building archives relating to and originating from Aboriginal peoples. Cooke's rather progressive suggestions included: that an Indian National Library of Literature be established; that such a library be established and maintained under the control of the Department of Indian Affairs at Ottawa; that a fund of five hundred dollars be established out of which the books and other library materials could be purchased; and that a portion of this library circulate, so that books could reach accredited Indi-

²⁵ Cooke's writing which resulted in publication, or which was intended for publication, include (in his lifetime): *A-de-rih-wa-nie-ton on-kwe-on-we ne-ha: a message to the Iroquois Indians*. Trans. by Charles A. Cooke (n.p.: The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, n.d.); Iroquois Personal Names. Unpublished manuscript and recordings. Ed. by Marius Barbeau (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1950); "Iroquois Personal Names" *New Frontiers* 2:2 (Fall, 1953), 29-31; "Iroquois Personal Names—their classification" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 96:4 (1952), 427-438; and *Onkweonwe* [magazine/newspaper] (1900-?). Ed. by Charles A. Cooke (Ottawa: F.X. Lemieux). Posthumously, Cooke's niece, Nona Argue, published one of his letters as: "Dear Friends of the Gibson Reserve: recalling troubled times in Oka 113 years ago" *Ottawa Citizen* (26 July 1990), A15.

²⁶ See: Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson, *Paddling her own canoe: the times and texts of E. Pauline Johnson, Tekahionwake* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

ans through the Indian Agents.²⁷ Accompanying his request, Cooke submitted letters of support from Band members, missionaries, Indian Agents, book dealers, and other interested parties, including a Naturalist at the Geological Survey of Canada, who observed: "It has always been a great matter of surprise to me that no safe repository for the preservation of our native Indian records should exist in Canada, and the only point in your circular which I do not entirely agree with is the use of the word 'might' in the several clauses."²⁸ Josiah Hill, writing from the Ohsweken Council House of the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, noted: "I have consulted two or three Chiefs upon the subject ... and they all seem to think that it would be a benefit to the Indians if such establishment could be carried out conveniently, and I quite agree with them."²⁹ Also from Six Nations, Chief J.W.M. Elliott added, "I have spoken to some of our most intelligent and influential Chiefs about the project of starting an Indian Library in connection with the Department of Indian Affairs and like my self they are in favour of it."³⁰

Cooke's initiative in gathering sup-

port for the cause of his Indian National Library was impressive. Recognising that a great deal of knowledge and records were "in the possession of bands scattered throughout the Dominion, and others ... published in book form, issued in small editions, and having a limited circulation, and so are gradually lost to succeeding generations," Cooke went to great effort to write to rare book dealers, missionaries and members of Indian Band Councils across the country, asking for their suggestions and support for the Indian National Library project. And as the range of support indicated, Cooke's vision was clearly understood to be of significant value by parties outside the Department of Indian Affairs.³¹ However, Sifton transferred responsibility of the matter to Duncan Campbell Scott, who quickly and effectively dismissed the most progressive of Cooke's suggestions. Scott responded with favourable comments relating to Cooke, describing him as "an intelligent young Mohawk," but unfavourably dismissed Cooke's ideas regarding his vision of an Indian National Library: "There is certainly an idea at the bottom of this scheme of his which is worth consider-

²⁷ RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-2 pt. 2A, Letter to the Hon. Clifford Sifton, from Charles A. Cooke, January 1904.

²⁸ RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-2 pt. 2A, Letter to Charles A. Cooke, from John Mawson, Naturalist, Geological Survey of Canada, 21 March 1904.

²⁹ RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-2 pt. 2A, Letter to Charles A. Cooke, from Josiah Hill, Ohsweken Council House, 22 February 1904.

³⁰ RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-2 pt. 2A, Letter to Charles A. Cooke, from Chief J. W. M. Elliott, Six Nations Reserve, 29 February 1904.

³¹ In the correspondence included in RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-2 pt. 2A, there are at least fifteen letters in glowing support of Cooke's idea to establish an Indian National Library. A number of the letters are in very poor condition, and are thus unreadable. All those included, however, appear to express positive support. Cooke himself quotes from twelve of these in a letter to Frank Pedley, Deputy Superintendent General.

ing, but ... it has no great practical utility in its present form. There are two features which should not be adopted as part of an official scheme; I do not think the Indians ought to contribute, and I do not think the library should be circulating.”³²

As was the case with an overwhelming number of crucially important decisions made by Scott during his tenure at Indian Affairs, the matter was refused on the grounds of its potential cost.³³ And given what we know of Scott’s narrow and paternal vision with regards to administering Indian affairs, the matter was likely seen as frivolous and unnecessary in relation to the Department’s ultimate goal of assimilating Aboriginal peoples and eliminating the “Indian problem.” Nonetheless, that Scott, the literary man, Poet of Confederation, turned down an idea so closely related to a literary endeavour, seems puzzling, revealing him to be a strict administrator and book-keeper. Cooke’s Indian National Library may have made a significant contribution towards fostering relations between the department and Aboriginal peoples, and provided a priceless contribution to future researchers and scholars, had it not

been shrugged off at such an early date.³⁴

If Scott ignored the heart of Cooke’s suggestions, at least the proposal led to the formation of a workable departmental library. From the time that the Department’s collection of books and journals was first envisioned in 1893, until 1904, the library stood as a small collection of ethnographic reports, and similar publications, collected mostly by Scott and later, Frank Pedley, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs (1902-1913), for the use of select Department employees. The collection was not organised in any useful way, nor was there a librarian or other individual charged with its care and maintenance.³⁵ When Cooke presented his ideas in relation to improving the library in 1904, Scott quickly dismissed any suggestion of Aboriginal contribution to the collection, referring to the existing records of Indian tribes as “meagre and not of much importance,” and similarly ignored the idea that Aboriginal peoples make any use of the library.

He was, however, prompted by Cooke’s proposal to turn what had amounted to an unorganised collection of books and journals into an organised

³² RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-1, Reel C-11321, Letter to the Hon. Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, from Duncan Campbell Scott, Ottawa, 29 January 1904.

³³ See: E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1986), passim.

³⁴ It is important to note that the Federal government’s 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, recommended that a “National Aboriginal Documentation Centre” be established to “research, collect, preserve and disseminate information related to residential schools, relocations and other aspects of Aboriginal historical experience.” Cooke’s proposed Indian National Library was therefore more than ninety years ahead of its time. See recommendation 3.5.36, *Gathering strength: volume 3 of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1996), 538-39.

³⁵ RG 10, Volume 2740, File 145131, Reel C-11273, Ottawa, Ontario—Correspondence regarding the establishment of a library in the Department of Indian Affairs (orders, accounts, clippings), 1893-1904.

library. Scott ordered that a departmental library should be established containing books “dealing with the early history of the country in which the Indians played such an important part; works of value relating to ethnology, folk-lore, dictionaries, vocabularies, and books in native languages, etc,” noting that the Parliamentary Library, which at the time served the purposes of a national library in Canada, was ill equipped in books of this nature. Scott asked that all books in the department be collected and kept together in the new library, “under the custody of some competent person...under lock and key and... subject to ordinary library regulations.” Scott himself was responsible for supervising all library purchases, unfortunately, and Mr. Stewart, the department’s Assistant Secretary, was, in addition to his regular duties, selected to act as the librarian. This was a position that Cooke himself was certainly qualified to undertake, but he was nevertheless passed over in favour of Stewart, perhaps for reasons of seniority.³⁶

Recognising there was merit in Cooke’s suggestions relating to collecting and organising works of historical value, to his credit, Scott ordered that all Department records scheduled for transfer to the Dominion Archives should be copied and kept for future reference within the Department: “These should be copied from time to time...bound and indexed so that in a short time...we could have a complete basis for a history of the

Indians of North America under British Rule....I think if we give careful attention to a library of Indian literature and a repository for copies of all Indian archives, we shall be doing a useful and necessary work.”³⁷ Scott insisted, however, that the records and reflections of Aboriginal people themselves were not valuable or worthy of considering or including in the collection. This attitude is consistent with Scott’s behaviour as an administrator of Indian Affairs, who only sought to eliminate the “Indian problem” through assimilation, and minimising First Nations’ voices and traditional contributions. Scott’s notion of history, as it related to the First Peoples of Canada, effectively excluded Aboriginal people themselves from constructing and telling their own stories and experiences. Scott understood Indian history to exist only within the realms of what was written by members of the Indian Affairs department, government, and other Euro-Canadians, and therefore he effectively killed Cooke’s suggestion that First Peoples’ own understandings of their histories and visions of the future be included in the Department’s library.

Although his ideas were not considered to be of great vision or value in the eyes of Scott and the decision makers at Indian Affairs at the time, Cooke continued to work subtly, gathering materials for the library, and he attempted to make progress in the interests of First Peoples as an Indian employee working within

³⁶ RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-1, Reel C-11321, Letter to the Hon. Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, from Duncan Campbell Scott, Ottawa, 29 January 1904.

³⁷ Letter to Hon. Clifford Sifton, from Duncan Campbell Scott, 29 January 1904.

the department. In August 1904, Cooke suggested that all photographs taken for inclusion in the Department's annual reports be included and catalogued in the library, noting "A collection of this kind would, in years to come, prove very interesting and useful."³⁸ When nothing was done in response to his initiatives (the collection remained uncatalogued and largely inaccessible) Cooke issued a memorandum, commenting that although a number of books had been collected for the library, Department personnel desiring to use the collection were still waiting to do so because the collection was difficult to access and remained scattered throughout the Department: "I beg leave to suggest that some one be now designated ... as Librarian. The books should be catalogued, and those which are now in the Secretary's Rooms should be placed with those recently acquired."³⁹ Access issues for Department employees were clearly frustrating. Not only was Scott's vision of a library one of a collection "kept under lock and key," but materials were apparently dispersed throughout the Department and only available to select officials. Cooke's interests in building a workable and accessible departmental library appeared to be rooted in a desire to provide the tools for all Department employees to access information and make educated decisions. Further, his ide-

as were meant to encourage consultation and an exchange of ideas between the Department and Aboriginal peoples, whose knowledge could provide unique insight and vision to departmental activities.

Without outside Aboriginal involvement, the library developed as one might expect over the next twenty-five years. Duncan Campbell Scott chose the vast majority of all publications ordered for the collection, and the library contained little or no literature written from an Aboriginal point of view.⁴⁰ Titles ordered following 1904 were, not surprisingly, representative of Euro-Canadian or American interpretations of Aboriginal histories, cultures and languages, and a seemingly disproportionate number of titles had little or nothing at all to do specifically with First Peoples. The library remained quite small throughout Scott's tenure, and operated on the slimmest of budgets. B. Parker is given as the librarian in 1924, with a collection size of just over 1,000 non-circulating items—all for reference purposes. Parker reportedly received no salary as librarian, and was thus charged with the care of the library in addition to other, seemingly more important duties.⁴¹ Clearly Cooke's grand vision of an Indian National Library failed to develop during his time of employment with the Department. Instead, a rather small collection emerged that was only available to em-

³⁸ RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-1 pt. 1, Reel 11321, Letter to The Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, from Charles A. Cooke, 29 August 1904.

³⁹ RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-1 pt. 1, Reel C-11321, Memorandum to the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, from Charles A. Cooke, 10 November 1904.

⁴⁰ See those records contained within: RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-1 pt. 1, Reel-C-11321.

⁴¹ RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-1 pt. 1, Reel C-11321, Report filed for the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Library Statistics, 1923.

ployees of the Department headquarters in Ottawa. Budgetary concerns dominated any selection of materials that did take place (rather than actual need, or any desire to offer much in terms of intellectual stimulation), and the collection was under the guardianship of only a part-time and unpaid librarian at best. In 1938, twelve years following the retirement of Cooke, and his efforts in lobbying on behalf of the departmental library, the collection was considered to be of even less value, much as it had existed before 1904, reported as a disorganized “private collection of books for the use of the [Indian Affairs] Branch,” with no librarian in charge.⁴²

Although his proposed Indian National Library never emerged, Cooke’s efforts as an employee of Indian Affairs were characterised by consistent lobbying in the interests of First Peoples, and an apparent expectation and hope that the relationship between Indian Affairs and Aboriginal people could be one rooted in cooperation, equality, and fair consultation. Cooke’s ideas in establishing an Indian National Library through the Department of Indian Affairs were a

natural continuation of his earlier initiatives within the Department in compiling a “Comparative and Synoptical Indian Dictionary,” and in his efforts to compile, edit, and publish a newspaper in the Mohawk language. Each of these efforts was Cooke’s own, which he presented to officials within the Department and gathered support. In May of 1899, Cooke solicited the department for funding in researching and compiling a comparative dictionary of Aboriginal languages, which he naively described as “embracing as many as possible of all the spoken Indian languages of today throughout Canada & U. S., and will be particularly invaluable with interests of philology & ethnology.”⁴³ This massive undertaking was one that Cooke continued to work on throughout his career and well into his retirement, culminating in 1950 in an extensive manuscript on Iroquois personal names. This manuscript, sponsored in part by the National Museum of Canada and the American Philosophical Society, contained more than 6,000 names taken down in missionary spelling, with phonetic renderings and tape recordings made by Cooke.⁴⁴

⁴² RG 10, Volume 3081, File 270000-1 pt. 1, Reel C-11321, T.R.L. MacInnes, Secretary of Indian Affairs, to R.R. Coates, Dominion Statistician, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 4 April 1938. Institutional memory at Indian Affairs, by the way, is apparently rather short. When the author spoke to the research librarians at the departmental library a few years ago they were only aware of the library’s existence since 1966 [Pierre Beaudreau, Research Librarian, Departmental Library, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Personal Correspondence, 13 November 2001].

⁴³ RG 10, Volume 2974, File 209860, St-François Agency—Correspondence regarding the *Comparative Indian Vocabulary*, Charles A. Cooke (List of words frequently used by Indians).

⁴⁴ For more information on Cooke’s work in compiling the vocabulary, see: Barbeau, 424-25; and Cooke, “Iroquois personal names,” *Proceedings*, 427-38. Cooke sold one copy of the compilation to the American Philosophical Society in 1951, for a reported fee of \$600. In today’s dollars, that would be something in the neighbourhood of \$4,750. This price is reported in: Canadian Museum of Civilization. Library, Archives and Documentation, Marius Barbeau Collection (Huron-Wyandot Files), Charles A. Cooke, Mohawk Scholar, File B-G-162, Marius Barbeau to Dr. F.J. Alcock, 19 February 1952. The manu-



The front page of *Onkweonwe*, volume 1, number 1, compiled, edited, and distributed by Charles A. Cooke, circa 1900 (Library and Archives Canada, AMICUS No. 8518427).

dian Affairs to correspond widely with Mohawk Chiefs throughout Ontario, Quebec, and the United States, asking for support, to encourage subscribers, and to elicit Aboriginal involvement and contribution to the paper. *Onkweonwe*, according to an article published in the *Sudbury Journal* in relation to the paper, began “some time ago... [as] a semi-monthly magazine.” So successful was the endeavour, Cooke “decided to turn it into a newspaper, the first of its kind in Canada and the second in America.”⁴⁵ Cooke originally envisioned that the publication would be issued every two weeks, and contain general news items, Indian news, and information helpful to Indians in agriculture, trading, hunting, and education.⁴⁶ The subscription price was set at twenty-five cents a year for “Indians who are able to pay, and free to the unable” and fifty cents a year for “white subscribers.” The first issue of *Onkweonwe* was published on 25 October 1900, in magazine format but according to his correspondence, soon afterwards Cooke

In 1900, Cooke took the initiative to compile and edit a newspaper in the Mohawk language, which he entitled, *Onkweonwe*, Mohawk for “Aboriginal people.” The department appears to have had no involvement in the project except to have possibly provided a publisher, but Cooke took advantage of his position within In-

script and tape recordings are today held in the American Philosophical Society Library’s American Indian Manuscripts collection, in Philadelphia, PA, and in the Library and Archives of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, QC.

⁴⁵ “A Paper for the Mohawks: the new weekly will be printed in their own tongue” *Sudbury Journal* (30 May 1901), 1.

⁴⁶ RG 10, Volume 1307, Reel C-13907, Records concerning an Indian newspaper edited by Charles Cook.

encountered some difficulty in publishing additional issues. Only five days following the publication of the first issue, Cooke appeared frustrated in his efforts to gather sufficient Aboriginal contribution.⁴⁷

Failing to gather enough interest and contributions to publish again within two weeks, Cooke on the 29th of November, in a letter asking for financial donations, described the publication as fortnightly, and although he then claimed to have “400 subscribers...throughout Canada and Ontario and in the state of New York,”⁴⁸ further efforts in publishing additional issues were complicated, and it is uncertain how many issues of *Onkweonwe* were eventually published. The only known surviving copy of *Onkweonwe* is volume 1, number 1, housed in the National Library of Canada. However, the *Sudbury Journal* republished at least two stories from the newspaper format of *Onkweonwe* in May, 1901, so we know that further issues were indeed published, although their extent is not known. Although short-lived, the paper was the first Aboriginal language newspaper written, compiled, and published solely by an Aboriginal person in Canada.⁴⁹ All previous publications in Aboriginal languages were written and published by European or Canadian missionaries.

One of the reprinted stories in the *Sudbury Journal*, translated into English, was about “Indian John, a celebrated Mohawk guide,” who reportedly lived at the time near Eganville, Ontario, and was eighty years old.⁵⁰ This story gives us some sense of the nature of the writing in the newspaper version of *Onkweonwe*. In the only existing copy (in the magazine format), *Onkweonwe* features mainly contemporary reports and stories from Iroquois communities in Quebec, Ontario, and New York State, including the Six Nations reserve near Brantford, Oneida reserve near London, the Mohawk reserves of Tyendinaga, Kahnawake, Kanehsatake, and Watha, as well as Huron Lorette (today known as Wendake). Other topics discussed include foreign affairs, national affairs, economy, and sports. With regards to national affairs, Cooke provided the names of candidates running in the federal elections of November, 1900, with particular reference to those candidates running in the ridings in Ontario and Quebec where the Iroquois (and Huron) reserves were located. Additionally, Cooke provides the dates of hunting seasons for deer, moose, elk, beaver, otter, muskrat, and rabbit in Quebec, and lists the current prices of potatoes, onions, apples, sugar, butter, eggs, chicken, duck, beef, hogs, and lamb. And, of course, he

⁴⁷ RG 10, Volume 1307, Reel C-13907, Letter from Charles Cooke dated 30 October 1900.

⁴⁸ RG 10, Volume 1307, Reel C-13907, Letter from Charles Cooke dated 29 November 1900.

⁴⁹ The first Aboriginal language newspaper in North America, published by an Aboriginal person, was the *Cherokee Advocate*. *Onkweonwe* was indeed the first of its kind in Canada. To get a sense of the range of serial publications in Aboriginal languages in Canada and the United States, see: James P. Danky, ed. *Native American periodicals and newspapers 1828-1982: bibliography, publishing record, and holdings*, compiled by Maureen E. Hady (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1984).

⁵⁰ See “A Paper for the Mohawks” *Sudbury Journal*, 1.

did not neglect to mention the current lacrosse standings.⁵¹ So, while our existing copy of *Onkweonwe* is only four pages long, it is packed with information useful and relevant to the Aboriginal communities of Ontario and Quebec.

Cooke as a Recruiter during the First World War

During the First World War, Cooke's status as an Aboriginal person working within the Department was convenient for the sake of recruitment. Cooke "did his part" for the war effort in travelling extensively to Indian communities throughout Ontario and Quebec, encouraging the young men to enlist. From the moment the first call went out to Canadians to fight, Aboriginal peoples (along with other significant minority groups like Blacks and Asians), lined up to enlist. But Aboriginal people were initially discouraged and outrightly turned down from enlisting in the war effort in large part due to the "nature of Canadian race sentiment" in the early part of the twentieth century. In other words, there was a general sense of white superiority, and the idea that certain peoples (visible minorities, mainly) were "militarily incompetent."⁵² Never mind that Aboriginal and Black communities in Canada had proud records of military service prior to Confederation—the stereotypes of incompetence and undesirability held

towards visible minorities by Euro-Canadians were powerful. By the spring of 1916, however, with the intensity of the war increasing, Indians, along with other visible minorities, began to be accepted as recruits. Charles Cooke was seconded by the Department of Indian Affairs to work as a recruiter for the 114th battalion, which was supposed to be an all-Indian regiment. Given the honorary rank of lieutenant, Cooke travelled Ontario and Quebec, often with an Indian commissioned officer, "stressing the pride and the opportunity derived from serving in an identifiably Indian unit."⁵³ Thanks in part to Cooke's work, more than 4,000 Aboriginal people served in uniform in the war effort, an uncountable number of others volunteered, but were rejected, and surely thousands more—men and women—participated in the war effort through patriotic organizations, in industrial and agricultural pursuits, and donations to patriotic funds.

Aboriginal persistence in volunteering for the war effort revealed that they "had not been defeated by the racism of white society, had not accepted its rationalizations, and were not prepared quietly to accept inferior status." Further, Aboriginal involvement in the First World War, spurred in part by Cooke, demonstrated that they had not lost faith in Canada and Canadian justice, and that they were confident in their equality to Euro-Canadians,

⁵¹ Thank you to Gunther Michelson for his translation of *Onkweonwe*. Gunther Michelson. Personal Correspondence. 7 November 2002.

⁵² James W. St.G. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in the World War I: enlistment of visible minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Historical Review* 70:1 (1989), 1-26.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13.

and still loyal to Canada and the empire.⁵⁴ Aboriginal people volunteered, and were actively encouraged to volunteer by their communities (and through the efforts of Charles Cooke), because they sought to gain group recognition and to further the rights of their people. When Prime Minister Borden introduced conscription in 1917, Aboriginal people protested loudly, refusing to report on the grounds that as wards of the state—legal minors and treated as children—with no vote and no voice in the conduct of the war, it was unfair to expect them to participate in the war. As one Ontario Indian declaration proclaimed, “we cannot say that we are fighting for our liberty, freedom and other privileges dear to all nations, for we have none.”⁵⁵

Frustrated with how they were first refused as volunteers, and then later hounded by recruiters, members of the Six Nations, who had at first offered their assistance as allies in 1914, began to oppose recruiters in 1916, stating that they were an independent people and would only enlist upon the personal appeal of the governor general and recognition of their special status.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, Aboriginal contributions to the war effort, in Ontario at least, encouraged and moulded in no small part by Charles Cooke, were car-

ried out in hopes that the Euro-Canadian perception of Indians would improve. Aboriginal people sought to fight side-by-side their Euro-Canadian countrymen in a symbolic effort to entrench ideas of equality and positive perception in the minds of non-Aboriginals and government. As in Cooke’s other efforts, his war service was carried out in an effort to give Indians a stronger voice and to rectify the overtly negative images many Euro-Canadians felt towards Aboriginal peoples.

A Scholar and Performer in Retirement

Cooke had a relatively long career in the Department of Indian Affairs, working into his late fifties (he retired from the public service in 1926). But his retirement was equally long and productive. In retirement, Cooke continued an active schedule devoted to the betterment of Aboriginal peoples through research, publishing, and performance. His rough diary entries, in 1944, reveal a man who was a voracious reader and a regular writer, often remaining “in all day & at night, reading & writing etc.,” or visiting the Parliamentary Reading Room and Library, or the Museum Library, for new books, and conducting research at the Archives.⁵⁷ Amongst his papers held at

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Walker, “Race and Recruitment,” 18.

⁵⁶ See: Walker, “Race and Recruitment,” 16; RG 10, Volume 6765, File 452-7, Charles Cooke to Duncan Campbell Scott, 12 February and 4 March 1916; and “Indians” *Ontario and the First World War, 1914-1918: a collection of documents*. Barbara M. Wilson, ed. (Toronto: Champlain Society and University of Toronto Press, 1977), cv-cxiv, 169-75.

⁵⁷ See Cooke’s rough and undated diary and journal writing in the Cooke Family Papers (held by grandson, Graham Cooke, in Edmonton). Composed on his old letterhead (designed in the 1910s), Cooke’s entries are detailed accounts of his daily doings, the weather, costs, and thoughts. A brief snapshot

the Canadian Museum of Civilization, is a neatly kept pocket book listing, alphabetically, titles of books relating to Indians. Correspondence between Marius Barbeau and the National Museum, following Cooke's death in 1959, indicates that Cooke indeed owned a small library, but in all likelihood he kept this inventory of books on hand for his numerous trips to libraries and archives.⁵⁸ Cooke was a scholar indeed.

A staunch Methodist, Cooke attended church services regularly and was very active as a member of the Ottawa-based Stewarton United Church choir. His father, Angus Cooke, had regularly preached on the Gibson reserve in the absence of the local missionary, and was integral in building the Methodist church at Gibson. For his efforts, Angus was considered "Chief," and his strong sense of faith and community activism was clearly a great influence on Charles. In relation to his church membership, Charles was also an integral member of the noted Hiawatha Quartet, "whose appearances in this area [Ottawa] guaranteed sell-out crowds," and a life member of the Prince of Wales Lodge A.F. and A.M. (the Fraternal Order of Free and

Accepted Masons), and the Canadian Order of Foresters.⁵⁹ Cooke's Methodist devotion undoubtedly influenced his print and literary efforts. Education and literacy was a key element in Methodist thought and in disseminating its broader social message geared towards shaping the spiritual and moral characteristics of national life. The Methodist philosophy (which also influenced nineteenth-century Aboriginal writers like Peter Jones) recognised that knowledge could be used for good or evil, depending on how it was learned and utilised. Thus the goal of education from a Methodist perspective was to stimulate knowledge that could help to reveal God's purpose and work.⁶⁰

Prior to, and following his retirement from the Department of Indian Affairs in 1926, Cooke worked hard in raising the public profile of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, in part by touring all over Canada and the United States, speaking and performing at churches and community halls, but also through his close association with the anthropologist Marius Barbeau. His efforts included at least one known publication, a pamphlet which he translated into Mohawk, and published with the National Spiritual Assembly of

of his life between October and December, entries around the Christmas season reveal the year (1944), and a man who often reflected on the past, including the November anniversary of his second marriage, and the sorrow he felt over the death of his first wife (Cooke's first wife, Edith, died in 1915 at the age of 47. He remarried in November, 1919, to his first wife's younger sister, Minnie). As he explains in the entry of 24 December, he often found himself "wandering in the *cul de sac* of spiritual life."

⁵⁸ Marius Barbeau Collection (Huron-Wyandot Files), Books re: Indians.

⁵⁹ "Charles A. Cooke: internationally famed Indian scholar dies, 88" *Ottawa Citizen* (14 April 1958) 1149.

⁶⁰ For more on the Methodist philosophy with regards to literacy and education, see: Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: the history of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); and Edwards, *Paper Talk*, 45-54.

the Baha'is of Canada.⁶¹ This pamphlet, entitled "A Message to the Iroquois Indians," was published as a missionary aid for Baha'i propagators near Kahnawake. In addition to translating the document, Cooke is said to have acted as an intermediary on behalf of the Baha'is. In a letter he sent to their Quebec Regional Teaching Committee, Cooke says, "Since writing last I had the privilege of visiting the Mohawks at Oka, and sowed the seeds for the propagation of the work of the Baha'is...."⁶²

The Baha'i News reported that his assistance was "particularly interesting as Mr. Cooke...has for years been well and favourably known by the church groups in Eastern Ontario and Quebec for his work in bringing the problems of the Indian to the attention of the public as a church member."⁶³ Cooke's interest and apparent attraction to the Baha'i faith likely came from a shared desire to see Aboriginal peoples and Canadians of other ethnic backgrounds treated fairly and equally. The

Baha'i faith was founded on the principle of the spiritual unity of all peoples—a philosophy certainly in line with Cooke's interests.

As a singer, Cooke was known throughout Canada and the U.S. (particularly in Ontario and Quebec) where he toured between 1926 and 1934. In his own words, "after retirement in 1926 [I] devoted attention to lecturing and concerts-recitals, from Sidney [sic], N.S. across to Victoria."⁶⁴ Blessed with a rich bass voice, Cooke performed regularly and extensively. In addition to his activities in the Stewarton United Church and the Hia-



A promotional flyer advertising Charles A. Cooke as a recitalist and entertainer (Cooke Family Papers, Edmonton).

watha Quartet, he was also a celebrated member of the Torrey-Alexander Choir of Ottawa as organiser and leader. In a certificate of appreciation presented to Cooke by this choir in December, 1906, Mrs. W.M. Joelyn expressed on the choir's behalf that his leadership was effective in "drawing us more closely together, both socially and spiritually."⁶⁵ Cooke even designed his own letterhead, advertising

⁶¹ *A-de-rib-wa-nie-ton On-kwe-on-we Neb-ha: a message to the Iroquois Indians*. Trans. by Charles A. Cooke (n.p.: The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, n.d.). *The Baha'i News* mentioned the publication of this pamphlet in its April, 1956 [no. 75] issue [p. 4].

⁶² Quoted in *The Baha'i News* 75 (April, 1956), 4.

⁶³ *The Baha'i News* 75 (April, 1956), 4.

⁶⁴ Marius Barbeau Collection (Huron-Wyandot Files), Iroquois Names Recorded by Charles Cooke, B-G-164, Autobiographical notes.

⁶⁵ A copy of this certificate is included in the Cooke family papers held by Graham Cooke in Edmonton.

himself as available to give concerts, recitals, lectures, and socials as “Canada’s Indian Basso and Reader.” Similarly, a promotional pamphlet advertised Cooke as sporting an “Extensive Repertoire of Choicest Sacred, Patriotic, National Humorous Songs and Readings.” Testimonials from audiences and news reports as far away as New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island praised his “fine clear bass voice,” maintaining a “perfect richness and the perfection of his enunciation adds to the pleasure of his auditors.”⁶⁶ As part of his popular performances, Cooke dressed in Indian costume, as something of the male counterpart to E. Pauline Johnson, who was similarly active at the turn of the century.

Although he was not as famous, Cooke’s performances as a singer are reminiscent of Oskenonton (1886-1955), “the singer from Muskoka,” who was similarly performing around the same time. Although Okenonton was internationally acclaimed during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, very little has been mentioned of him in academic scholarship. Reportedly a member of the Bear Clan of the Mo-

hawk at Kahnawake, he was “Orphaned at an early age,” and “spent his formative years living with relatives and in missionary schools, with intervals of residing in nearby forests.”⁶⁷ Overheard singing by a group of Euro-American campers in 1915, he was invited to perform at the Christmas tree lighting in Madison Square Garden that December, and so began his illustrious singing career. In 1918 he appeared in a Jerome Kern musical, produced by Henry W. Savage, on Broadway, called “Toot-Toot.” Touring throughout the English-speaking world, Oskenonton studied the musical traditions of other North American Aboriginal people, and performed these along with those of the Mohawk.⁶⁸ Grey Owl’s biographer, Professor Donald Smith, reveals that Oskenonton was also known as Louis Deer, and with an English friend, Ted Blackmore, he constructed the Plains Indian headdress that Grey Owl bought in London in 1936.⁶⁹ Oskenonton’s popularity was such that Cooke would have undoubtedly been aware of his performances, and it is possible that he even modelled himself in a similar fashion.

⁶⁶ From Cooke’s promotional pamphlet, held in the Cooke family papers in Edmonton.

⁶⁷ “Biographical Note,” Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, MSS 294, Chief Oskenonton Collection, Mashantucket, Connecticut.

⁶⁸ These scarce biographical details on Oskenonton have been obtained primarily through the following: “Biographical Note,” Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, MSS 294, Chief Oskenonton Collection, Mashantucket, Connecticut; and “‘War Song’ by Chief Oskenonton.” August, 2007. Robert’s Old Shmaltz Archives. 15 March 2008 <<http://www.raeproductions.com/music/war.html>>. Additional tidbits can be found on the website of the University of New Mexico’s Digital Collections <<http://econtent.unm.edu/index.php>> ; Bishop Bryant, “Canada’s Blackest Blot!,” *Toronto Star Weekly* (28 May 1938); and Bessie Hilton, “The Visit of Chief Os-Ke-Non-Ton,” *Lumen* (Easter Term, 1938). Reprinted on the website of the Farnworth Grammar School, near Manchester, England, 4 July 2003 <http://www.fgs.utvinternet.com/38_Lumen_2.html>.

⁶⁹ Donald B. Smith, *From the Land of the Shadows: the making of Grey Owl* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1990), 129.

By chance, archival records relating to Cooke's linguistic work with Marius Barbeau at the Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, also reveal something of his lecturing and performances in the mid-1920s. Recorded on index cards, interspersed amongst the materials donated to the museum by his widow, Minnie Cooke, is a revealing record of Charles' performances between October 1923 and July 1924. Although likely incomplete, these notes reveal the places in which he performed, the precise songs and lore he recited, and the fee he was paid. Earning on average between \$10 and \$15 (the equivalent of approximately \$125 to \$185 in 2009 prices), Cooke sang and recited a mix of material, including an ode to famed Ottawa-area politician, Alonzo Wright (the "King of the Gatineau")⁷⁰, Pauline Johnson's famous poem, "The Cattle Thief," an address on "Indian Courtship," the British lyric, "Old Mother Hubbard," and songs such as "Friend O' Mine," "The Skipper," "My Land," and "The Floral Dance," among others.⁷¹ These records reveal that Cooke was invited, and well-received in mainly small, rural communities, such as Tamworth, Cherry Valley, Haliburton, Dundela, Hawthorn, Ivanhoe, Opinicon

Lake, and Millbrook, Ontario, as well as communities like St. Andrews East and Dalhousie Mills in Quebec. Most of these communities are in the Ottawa-Peterborough-Kingston-Cornwall vicinity, well within a day's commute of his home in Ottawa (Cooke, in 1924, was still employed by the Department of Indian Affairs, thus any touring he undertook had to be local).⁷² A notice in the *Napanee Beaver*, in relation to his performance in Newburgh on 6 October 1923, describes Cooke's performance as "a treat" that should not be missed.⁷³

Cooke worked extensively with the famed Canadian anthropologist, Marius Barbeau. As early as 1913, Barbeau says that Cooke had worked with him on the Huron-Wyandot field notes, and in the early 1950s he was Barbeau's interpreter and go-between at the Six Nations reserve. Barbeau thought of Cooke as "a competent and industrious native scholar," and considered his Mohawk vocabulary work as "most valuable...by far the best—if not the only—lexicon of Mohawk in existence."⁷⁴ In other letters, Barbeau referred to Cooke as "a most industrious and far-seeing Mohawk scholar" who produced "monumental work."⁷⁵ Barbeau obvi-

⁷⁰ For more on Alonzo Wright, see: Pierre-Louis Lapointe, "Wright, Alonzo." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*. 2000. 21 January, 2008, <<http://www.biographi.ca>>.

⁷¹ Canadian Museum of Civilization. Library, Archives and Documentation (Ethnological Records), Charles A. Cooke Collection (III-I-150M), Mohawk Dictionary, File B424 f. 1.

⁷² Library, Archives and Documentation (Ethnological Records), Charles A. Cooke Collection (III-I-150M), Mohawk Dictionary, File B424 f. 1.

⁷³ *Napanee Beaver* (28 September 1923), 5.

⁷⁴ Marius Barbeau Collection (Huron-Wyandot Files), Charles A. Cooke, Mohawk Scholar, File B-G-162, Marius Barbeau to Dr. L.S. Russell [Acting Director, National Museum, Ottawa], 16 April 1959. See also: Marius Barbeau Collection (Huron-Wyandot Files), Charles A. Cooke, Mohawk Scholar, File B-G-162, Barbeau to Dr. William E. Lingelbach [Librarian, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia], 7 February 1952.

⁷⁵ Marius Barbeau Collection (Huron-Wyandot Files), Dr. Lingelbach Recording Cooke's Iroquois

ously thought very highly of Cooke, and was particularly excited by the extensive manuscript and recordings he produced on Iroquois names. From correspondence between Barbeau and Dr. William Lingelbach, Librarian at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, it is clear that Cooke undertook this work with hopes of publication. As Barbeau reports to Lingelbach during the summer of 1952, “he [Cooke] was telling me that his friends among the Iroquois are inquiring as to whether his large list of names will be published and when. They would be willing to subscribe to the cost of its publication.”⁷⁶ But as the manuscript was immensely large, and “bulky” in Barbeau’s words, it never found a publisher and has thus remained difficult to consult, particularly for interested Iroquois, as the only copies available are the archival originals.

Barbeau was instrumental in helping Cooke publish articles in the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, and recommended him to Margaret Fairley, editor of the Toronto-based, socially progressive magazine, *New Frontiers*.⁷⁷ *New Frontiers*, published by the Labour-Progressive Party of Canada, between the winter of 1952 and the summer of 1956,

was a decidedly leftist (i.e. Communist) magazine that celebrated Canadian arts and literature. Outspokenly opposed to the idea of “Canadian culture” celebrated and criticised by the Massey Commission (which the magazine characterised as demonstrating a “contempt for content,” failing to address the “widespread disgust at the degrading U.S. culture welcomed by Canadian business interests,” and tying cultural life to military defence by proposing the Council for the Arts, Letters and Social Sciences work hand-in-hand with the Department of External Affairs), *New Frontiers* sought to celebrate the art of the “working people” in such a way as to “contribute to the cause of world peace, and to Canadian progressive culture” (i.e. editorial staff identified themselves as subscribing to a Communist philosophy). Editor Margaret Fairley, was in addition to her editing duties, a well-known writer, educator, and political activist, and she was married to the equally well-known and respected educator and writer, Barker Fairley, who is perhaps most famous as co-founder of *Canadian Forum* and as a friend and promoter of the Group of Seven.⁷⁸

In the opening essay of the first vol-

Names, B-G-165, Barbeau to Dr. William Lingelbach, 7 May 1951.

⁷⁶ Marius Barbeau Collection (Huron-Wyandot Files), Dr. Lingelbach Recording Cooke’s Iroquois Names, B-G-165, Barbeau to Dr. William Lingelbach, 4 July 1952.

⁷⁷ Marius Barbeau Collection (Huron-Wyandot Files), Charles A. Cooke, Mohawk Scholar, File B-G-162, William E. Lingelbach [Librarian, American Philosophical Society] to Barbeau, 5 January and 6 February 1952; Marius Barbeau Collection (Huron-Wyandot Files), Charles A. Cooke, Mohawk Scholar, File B-G-162, Margaret Fairley [Editor, *New Frontiers*] to Barbeau, 27 February 1953.

⁷⁸ For more on Margaret and Barker Fairley, see: James Doyle, *Progressive Heritage: the evolution of a politically radical literary tradition in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002); David Frank, “The Progressive Tradition in Canadian Literature” *Labour/Le Travail* 52 (2003), 245-51; “David Kimmel, “The People vs. Margaret and Barker Fairley,” *The Bulletin* [University of Toronto] (23 March 1998); Kimmel, “The Spirit of Canadian Democracy: Margaret Fairley and the Communist

ume of *New Frontiers*, Fairley outlined the magazine's philosophy with regards to Aboriginal peoples:

When the fight for the rights of the Indian people is won, and we welcome them into full citizenship, they will bring with them their tradition of art as part of daily life.... In terms of modern life the tradition of Indian culture can only mean this: the effort to make the whole of life beautiful, and the expression through our culture of the most advanced knowledge and the most energetic creative work; not moccasins and knitted sweaters as the [Massey Commission] *Report* suggests.... Their decorative designs and their symbolic carvings, because they are rooted in their day by day struggle with nature, will enter into the tradition of all Canadians and will play a significant part in bringing art and life close together.⁷⁹

In publishing his work with *New Frontiers*, Cooke was sharing the page with notable Canadian leftist writers such as Dorothy Livesay, Milton Acorn, and George Ryga, among others.⁸⁰ Cooke's article in *New Frontiers*, "Iroquois Personal Names," is an abbreviated version of the more in-depth and linguistically focussed

paper, "Iroquois Personal Names—their classification," which he published a year earlier in the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*.

In the very same issue of *New Frontiers* in which Cooke's piece was featured, was an article by Eloise Street, editor of *Indian Time*, a quarterly magazine published at the time in Vancouver. Street's offering to *New Frontiers*, "Tzinquaw," was a review essay on the Aboriginal opera of the same name, which was touring the west coast at the time. Performed by the Cowichan Indian Players, and directed by Frank Morrison, *Tzinquaw* played to packed houses in New Westminster, BC, and was according to Street, "pioneering a new kind of Indian art" with the aim of helping to fund an Indian art centre. Street's magazine, *Indian Time*, began publication in 1950 (it ceased publication in 1959), and in her own words, "one thing we are doing is to give space to Indian writers and we are getting increasing recognition of our objectives."⁸¹ Among the Aboriginal authors who were published in the maga-

Cultural Worker's Responsibility to the People" *Left History* 1:1 (1993), 34-55; Kimmel and Gregory S. Kealey, "With Our Own Hands: Margaret Fairley and the 'Real Makers' of Canada" *Labour/Le Travail* 31 (1993), 253-85; Rodney Symington, "Fairley, Barker" *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Year 2000 Edition (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999), 812; Unsigned, Avrom Yanovsky, and Margaret Fairley, "Margaret Fairley: a remembrance: the Cultural Worker's Responsibility to the People" *Horizons: the Marxist Quarterly* 25 (1968), 1-6. The City of Toronto named a park after Margaret Fairley in the 1970s, located at the corner of Brunswick Avenue and Ulster Street.

⁷⁹ Margaret Fairley, "Our Cultural Heritage" *New Frontiers* 1:1 (Winter, 1955), 2.

⁸⁰ George Ryga (1932-1987) would later write and publish, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* in 1967. Now considered by some critics and students of theatre as the most important English-language play by a Canadian playwright, it is the story of a young Aboriginal woman arriving in the city, only to find she has no place with either her own people or the non-Aboriginal population. *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* was first staged at the Vancouver Playhouse, and later at the official opening of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, and in Washington, D.C., featuring Chief Dan George as Rita's father. See: James Hoffman, *The Ecstasy of Resistance: a biography of George Ryga* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1995); and Dianne Meili, "Chief Dan George: popular actor and chief accomplished much before his death." *Windspeaker* 26:3 (June, 2008), 26.

⁸¹ Queen's University Archives, Lorne and Edith Pierce Collection, Box 23, File 13, Item 14-16,

zine were Edward Williams (Mi'kmaq) and K'HHalserten Sepass. Williams published a serialised novel in *Indian Time*, entitled "Council in the Sky," beginning in the spring of 1954.⁸²

Conclusion

In his efforts to establish an Indian National Library, in *Onkweonwe*, and in his life-long efforts to compile a comparative vocabulary of the Iroquoian languages, Cooke was trying to balance his position within the Department of Indian Affairs as a "civilised Indian," with his Mohawk identity. Cooke's proposed Indian National Library, the short-lived newspaper/magazine, *Onkweonwe*, and his "Comparative and Synoptical Indian Dictionary," demonstrated an articulation, integration, and effort to employ Western modes of information and communication, and a high degree of literacy in relation to the printed word. Each of Cooke's initiatives, whether successful or not, was an attempt at redefining the largely Western technology of the printed word for the social, cultural, and political benefit of Aboriginal peoples, without compromising Aboriginal cultural interests and beliefs. In his library, newspaper, and dictionary projects, Cooke demonstrated a sincere interest in protecting, strengthening, and promoting Aboriginal languages, histories, and cultural practices, and his efforts were

motivated by a desire to create an environment where Aboriginal people could make meaningful contributions to the affairs of the Department.

At the same time, Cooke framed these efforts within a context that the colonial Indian Affairs department could understand and justify as potentially worthy projects. The establishment of school libraries and teaching Aboriginal children to read and write alphabetic texts were projects that the Department later adopted as part of their policy to assimilate and civilise Aboriginal peoples. In each proposal, Cooke attempted to sell his ideas on the basis that they were designed to "help and enlighten Indians" in colonial and assimilative interests, but each was also articulated in a way so as to help maintain the languages, histories, and practices of the First Peoples. The mandate of *Onkweonwe*, for example, was to provide insight into "agriculture, trading, hunting, household, education" and other information--a clear mix of Indian Affairs' colonial interests, and the interests of First Peoples themselves. Often frustrated by the lack of interest and initiative demonstrated by members of the Department, Cooke was similarly frustrated by a lack of Aboriginal interest in his proposals. The ultimate failure of *Onkweonwe* provides an obvious example, as do the observations of his colleague, the distinguished ethnographer and anthro-

Eloise Street [Editor, *Indian Time*] to Lorne Pierce, 27 May 1954.

⁸² John Napier-Hemy, "Student Seeks to Promote Education of B.C. Indians" *The Ubysey* XXXIII.27 (November 24 1950) 2; Petrone, *Native Literature in Canada*, 24-25; and Petrone, *First People, First Voices*, 143-46. See also: Queen's University Archives, Lorne and Edith Pierce Collection, Box 80, File 9, The songs of Y-ail-mihth: poem; and Khalserten Sepass, *Sepass Poems: the songs of Y-ail mihth*. Recorded by Eloise Street (New York: Vantage Press, 1963).

pologist Marius Barbeau,⁸³ who noted in 1951, “to [Cooke’s] regret he found out that the Indians themselves, instead of being interested in their own language and names, would give him scant encouragement. Suspicious, they did not respond whole-heartedly to his questions.”⁸⁴

Cooke acted as one of Barbeau’s informants between 1911 and 1914 in the noted anthropologist’s study of the Huron-Wyandot in Ontario, Quebec, and Oklahoma. Cooke later worked with Barbeau in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s in Barbeau’s assessment of Iroquoian languages. Barbeau’s biographer, Laurence Nowry, describes Cooke as “an indispensable go-between who skilfully wended a path through Six Nations politics and sensitivities...” whose perspective and scholarly work “was unique and probably indispensable for [the] successful completion of Barbeau’s Iroquois work.”⁸⁵ Cooke’s relationship with Barbeau was complicated by the fact that the anthropologist concluded that the Huron had been assimilated into white society, and that the Huron nation effectively no longer exist-

ed. The Indian Affairs department and the Canadian state readily agreed with these conclusions, citing Barbeau’s research in disestablishing a Huron reserve and forcibly enfranchising its population, thereby abolishing their Indian status.⁸⁶

Marius Barbeau compared Cooke to contemporary U.S. Indian scholars like Arthur C. Parker and J.N.B. Hewitt.⁸⁷ Parker was an active member of the Society of American Indians in the United States, and like Cooke he was a public speaker and writer. In one of his published articles in the *Southern Workman*, Parker addressed the topic of Indian citizenship, arguing for a moderate middle position where Indians should adopt a philosophy of “adjustment to modern conditions,” allowing them to remain Indian, with pride, while adapting for their own well-being:

Today, in the age of rapid development, when developed man has extended his power over the earth, gradually encroaching upon native races, those native races can only survive as they respond to the conditions and requirements that the advanced culture thrusts upon them.... Must not the Indian by force of

⁸³ Marius Barbeau (1883-1969) is perhaps the most prominent anthropologist in Canadian history. A member of the Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey of Canada between 1911 and 1948, his anthropological, folklorist, and ethnomusicological work was tremendously influential at both academic and political levels.

⁸⁴ Barbeau, 424.

⁸⁵ Laurence Nowry, *Marius Barbeau, Man of Mana: a biography* (Toronto: NC Press Limited, 1995), 350-351.

⁸⁶ See: Andrew Nurse, “‘But Now Things Have Changed’: Marius Barbeau and the politics of Amerindian identity” *Ethnohistory* 48:3 (2001), 433-72.

⁸⁷ Barbeau, 424-26. John Napoleon Brinton Hewitt (1859-1937), Tuscarora, was a linguist and ethnographer for the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. He contributed to the *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, and was characterised by a boundless need for research. At the time of his death, a 12,000 page manuscript was uncovered. The majority of his work was published posthumously. See: Blair A. Rudes and Dorothy Crouse, *The Tuscarora legend of J.N.B. Hewitt: materials for the study of the Tuscarora language and culture* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987).

circumstances turn to new things, accept new things, use new things, and employ the same methods of procuring these new things as are employed by the race that produced them and caused the change of conditions?

Between the conservationist and the extreme progressionist [sic] there should be a sane middle ground on which the best elements of both may be found.⁸⁸

Cooke and his Aboriginal Canadian counterparts were, as Lucy Maddox argues in relation to American Indian intellectuals, “attempting to create a public, political space for themselves.” In doing so, they “deliberately adopted, manipulated, and transformed the means already available to them for addressing white audiences,” particularly writing, publishing, and performance.⁸⁹ Although he never articulated it so clearly, like Parker, Cooke appears to have taken a moderate middle position with regards to the place and role of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society.

Cooke lived and worked between two cultures—on the one hand he complied with the stated colonial Canadian agenda, as a “civilised” Indian. On the other hand, his efforts to protect and strengthen Iroquoian languages and

promote Aboriginal involvement in the larger Canadian society on equal terms positioned Cooke as an intermediary, committed to two cultures, negotiating between clashing worldviews and multiple ideologies. In his efforts to enlist Aboriginal people for service in the First World War, he made the following observation regarding his status as an Aboriginal person working for the federal Department of Indian Affairs:

I wish to add that the reception given me on the different Reserves, all due no doubt to my nationality, and connections with the Department, have been most cordial, and that my visits have done much to reconvince the Indians that our Government is willing to recognise its wards by honouring them in having one in its service.⁹⁰

While he was often frustrated by both the Indian Affairs department and by Aboriginal people, Cooke’s insightful efforts were important in that they provided some semblance of Aboriginal agency at work within the Department, in an attempt to employ Western ideas of literacy and print culture in ways meant to benefit and further the political, social, and historical interests of First Peoples in Canada.

⁸⁸ Arthur C. Parker, “Progress for the Indian,” *Southern Workman* 41:11 (November 1912), 630.

⁸⁹ Lucy Maddox, *Citizen Indians: Native American intellectuals, race, and reform* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 16.

⁹⁰ RG 10, Volume 6765, File 452-7, War 1914 - 1918—Recruitment by Charles A. Cooke among the Indians of St. Regis, Caughnawaga and Oka, 1916 - 1917.