

Nikonha

Nikonha, also known as **Waskiteng** and **Mosquito**, was the last full-blooded speaker of **Tutelo**, a Virginia Siouan language. He is reported to have been around 106 when he died at **Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation**, Ontario in 1871; this would give him a birth date of ca. 1765.

The year before his death, he met with the ethnologist Horatio Hale, who gave the following description of him:

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 notebook. 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 jocose remarks, and much good-humored laughter.^[1]

Nikonha told Hale that his father had been a Tutelo chief named Onusowa, while his mother had died when he was a child, leaving him to be raised by his uncle. In 1779, when he was approximately 14, the Tutelo village of Coreorgonel, New York, was attacked during the Sullivan Expedition of the Revolutionary War, and the remnants fled, along with the Cayuga nation, to Grand River. Nikonha also served in the War of 1812. His wife was Cayuga, and he had only spoken Cayuga at home for years, until Hale induced him to provide about 100 words of the Tutelo language of his youth. Hale was collecting information on Tutelo from the few surviving individuals who had preserved any knowledge of it — who were, aside from Nikonha, heavily mixed with Cayuga. On the basis of the vocabulary and grammar that Hale collected, he was able to confirm the status of Tutelo as a Siouan language akin to Dakota and Hidatsa.

1 Notes

- [1] Horatio Hale, "Tutelo Tribe and Language", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 21, no. 114 (1883), 9-11.

2 External links

- Henry H. Mitchell, Pittsylvania Historical Society, 1997 - includes Hale's photograph of Nikonha.
- "Rediscovering Pittsylvania's "Missing" Native Americans - Virginia History". *Native Americans of Pittsylvania County, Virginia*. Retrieved 2012-08-10.

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3.1 Text

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