

Sayenqueraghta, Seneca War Chief

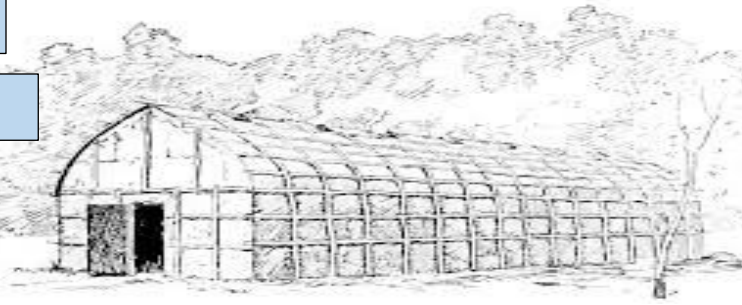
WHEN? 1707--1786

WHERE? Wyoming Valley

EVENT
Battle of Wyoming

VOCABULARY

clan
Iroquois
Haudenosaunee
longhouse
sachem



Sayenqueraghta, the great Seneca war chief grew up near present day Geneva, New York. Recognized as one of the wisest leaders of the Seneca, he was often sought after for his advice. He was held in high esteem by his people because he kept his word, he was kind and generous, brave and wise. In fact, he was known to host and “even adopt needy people, including white settlers” (Dziak 260). A member of the Turtle clan Sayenqueraghta was nicknamed Old Smoke. (There are over 20 different variations of the spelling of his name.) The term Old Smoke may refer to sitting around council fires and sharing his experiences or may refer to him being the smoke bearer.

Old Smoke was present at the meeting in 1754 at Albany with Connecticut Yankee settlers led by John Lydius. This is when the Natives were reportedly tricked into signing away their lands at Wyoming. He did not forget that deception. When the Natives were forced to sign away their claims to the southern gateway of their longhouse—the Wyoming Valley—that would not be forgotten either.

In 1763, Sayenqueraghta spoke in front of the Connecticut Assembly with a warning to the proposed settlement of the valley:

“We heard greivous news this Winter that you were about to come with 300 families to settle on our lands, which was very astonishing to us; and that you designed to build forts and strong places on our lands. For that reason our sachems considered upon it, and have sent us down to this place....We have heretofore given away lands to the White People, but of the sale of this land, the Six Nations know nothing—either that they have ever given it away, or sold it to any, and what little we have left we intend to keep for ourselves....Brothers, if you proceed to encroach on our lands we shall not be easy, but will return home to our own places and apply ourselves to the King, our father, to obtain justice” (Glickman 27, 28).



Sir William Johnson

Later, he was present at the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768 when the Iroquois were formally required to sign away any and all claims to Wyoming valley. Nonetheless, Old Smoke worked tirelessly with Sir William Johnson to build friendships and treaties between the Natives, colonists and the British. Johnson was the first head of Indian Affairs appointed by the King to handle the relationships between the British government and the Natives.

By 1778, however, Old Smoke was asked by Major John Butler, who was a close advisor to Johnson, to join with his band of British Rangers, Tories, and Natives (called Butler’s Rangers) to attack Wyoming in the summer of 1778. At first, Old Smoke was reluctant to join in this war party. He felt it was not in the best interest of his people to get involved. Butler and another



sachem, Joseph Brant, prevailed time and again on him to join and Old Smoke finally relented. Sayenqueraghta joined John Butler in the Battle of Wyoming.

Joseph Brant

ONLINE SOURCES

<https://archive.org/details/cu31924028676694/page/n9/mode/2up>

PRINT SOURCES

Dziak, Mark. *Battle of Wyoming*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018.

Glickman, Jay. *Remember Wyoming*. Affiliated Writers of Wyoming, Inc. Cody, Wyoming, 1997.