

THE CAYUGA CHIEF JACOB E. THOMAS: WALKING A NARROW PATH BETWEEN TWO WORLDS¹

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Abstract / Résumé

The Cayuga Chief Jacob E. Thomas (1922-1998) of the Six Nations Reserve, Ontario, worked on teaching and preserving the oral Native languages and traditions of the Longhouse by employing modern technologies such as audio- and video recorders and computers. His primary concern was to transmit and document them as much as possible in the face of their possible loss. Especially, he emphasized teaching the language and religious knowledge together. In this article, researched and written before his death, I discuss the way he taught his classes, examine the educational materials he produced, and assess their features. I also examine several reactions toward his efforts among Native people.

De son vivant Jacob E. Thomas (1922-1998), chef des Cayugas de la Réserve des Six Nations, en Ontario, a travaillé à l'enseignement et à la préservation des langues parlées autochtones et des traditions du Longhouse. Pour ce faire, il a eu recours aux techniques d'enregistrement audio et vidéo ainsi qu'à l'informatique. Devant le déclin possible des langues et des traditions autochtones, son but principal a été de les enregistrer et de les classer pour les rendre accessibles à tous. Il a particulièrement mis l'accent sur la nécessité d'enseigner conjointement la langue et la religion. Dans cet article, dont la recherche et la rédaction ont été accomplies avant la mort de Thomas, j'examine son enseignement en classe de même que le matériel pédagogique qu'il a créé et en évalue les caractéristiques. J'analyse en outre plusieurs réactions, chez les autochtones, quant à son oeuvre de pédagogue et de chercheur.

Introduction

In this paper, I attempt to describe and understand the efforts of the Cayuga Chief of the Iroquois Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, Jacob E. Thomas, to teach and preserve the languages and traditions of the Longhouse. I approached this topic by interviewing both him and friends, associates and colleagues of his, and by participating as a student in his class and observing his class as an outside scholar. When I first visited him in early 1994, my main purpose was to learn mythic narratives and study the Onondaga language with his help. After visiting him several times, I realized that he and his wife had long been working on teaching and preserving the languages and traditions of the Longhouse. As I became familiar with his efforts, it became clear to me that his work was very serious, sincere and important.

I visited him at his school called *The Jake Thomas Learning Centre*, located in Wilsonville near Brantford, Ontario, off the Six Nations Reserve, several times from the fall of 1995 to the spring of 1996. I participated in one of his classes entitled "The Cycle of Ceremony" in the winter of 1996, and interviewed some of the other class attendees. In addition, I interviewed Thomas and his wife Yvonne, and many of their friends and collaborators, approximately twelve people in all. Thomas is earnestly engaged in teaching and preserving the languages and traditions for both Native people (especially Native youths) and for non-Native people who are concerned with his work, because he sees the gradual disappearance, and the possible total loss of these languages and traditions.

Today, the gradual disappearance of languages has drawn attention from various segments of society. For example David Crystal addressed the world-wide trend of the disappearance of minority languages. Referring to the situation of the Native languages of North America, he writes that

There are 200 North American Indian languages, but only about 50 have more than 1,000 speakers, and only a handful have more than 50,000 (1997:43).

With respect to Canadian Natives, Michael K. Foster, who did a survey of Native languages in Canada, writes that

In the late twentieth century, the majority of Native people, particularly younger persons, did not speak an aboriginal language (1984)

and that only those languages with speakers of more than five thousand have "excellent chances of survival in the foreseeable future."² There are only three languages in this category, namely, Cree, Ojibwa and Inuktitut. As to the approximate number of speakers of the Northern Iroquoian

language in Canada, Foster gives 730, citing data from the 1991 Canadian Census, though he cautions us by noting

The figure for Iroquoian speakers...is too low, since other sources indicate between 1000-2000 speakers in Canada for Mohawk alone (*ibid.*)

If the Northern Iroquoian language speakers in the USA are included, estimates of the numbers of Native speakers of Iroquoian languages in the late 1970s in both Canada and the USA yield the following breakdown; Mohawk (3,000), Oneida (250), Onondaga (100-150), Cayuga (370), Seneca (425), and Tuscarora (47) (Foster, 1997). In terms of language survival, this is a grave situation for Native societies.

Many have refused to remain passively at the mercy of this historical trend and have started to use modern western technologies such as writing, audio recorders, and video recorders to preserve and document their traditionally oral languages. For example, the Hockak (Winnebago) in Wisconsin developed interactive multimedia computer programs for schoolchildren to allow them to gain familiarity with their Native language (Crystal, 1997:43). One of the Native leaders who work on preserving their languages is Jacob E. Thomas, who is a condoled Chief of the Hode'nosaunee (the Iroquois Confederacy), whose personal name is Hatahats?ikr htha? (which means 'he makes the clouds descend').

To promote his vision, he established *The Jake Thomas Learning Centre* in 1993, where he has taught and supervised classes on Iroquois languages and traditions, and created language texts and tapes.³ He walks a narrow path between two worlds, the oral tradition of his own society and the technology of the dominant society. His efforts deserve attention not only from his own people but also from non-Native people, especially, those who study the histories and cultures of Native North America.

In this paper, I will report on and discuss Thomas' efforts to teach and preserve Native languages and traditions, focusing especially on the attention he has given to religious and mythic traditions. He sees that language acquisition should go hand in hand with the learning of traditional knowledge, especially religious knowledge. While enduring the public intrusion of the technology and economy of the dominant society that contributes to undermining Native traditions, Thomas has found it useful and sometime imperative to draw on modern technology to protect and preserve his Native language and traditions.

In this discussion, I will first present short biographies of Thomas and his wife, and then give a summary of the history and social background of the Six Nations Reserve. After examining the historical situation, I will look at some aspects of his efforts to create both texts and audio tapes and I will

then analyze their contents in order to specify features of his educational materials, with special emphasis on religious traditions. Lastly, because Thomas aims at educating Native people, I will discuss several reactions from other Native people and the difficulties he faces.

Jacob E. Thomas and his Wife Yvonne

Jacob Ezra Thomas was born the youngest of seven children to Elizabeth Sky, a Cayuga of the Sandpiper clan, and David Thomas, an Onondaga, on the Six Nations Reserve in 1922.⁴ As clan affiliation in the Longhouse society was matrilineal, Thomas belonged to his mother's clan. From his parents and grandparents, he learned the Onondaga, Cayuga and Mohawk languages. For the most part he acquired his knowledge of traditions from his family, especially his father and grandfather. His father and his maternal grandfather were prominent ritualists in their day, and Thomas himself attended the Onondaga Longhouse where his father was as a ritualist. He was nurtured in the Longhouse since he was a young child, and it was there that he learned ritual songs and addresses, and probably mythic narratives. He was appointed as a "faithkeeper" in the early 1940s, and made a career as a ritual speaker. He was also inducted into several Iroquoian medicine societies, such as the Bear Society, the Little Water Society, the Dark Dance Society, the Otter Society and the Eagle Dance Society.⁵ He was elevated as a hereditary Chief of the Iroquois Confederacy and succeeded to the Cayuga title Teyohowé-tho-? in 1973.

Thomas went to a grammar school, but did not attend high school.⁶ He had various jobs when he was younger, but his innate nature was that of a teacher. In the late 1960s and 1970s, he worked as an instructor of culture and languages at such schools as the North American Indian Travelling College in the Akwesasne Reserve and the Woodland Culture Centre near Brandford. He received a certificate as a language teacher and in Native education from Trent University, where he joined the faculty in the Department of Native Studies. He taught courses on Native American cultures from 1976 until 1991, while collaborating with such noted American scholars as William N. Fenton, Denis Foley, Francis Jennings, Mary Druke, Anne-marie Shimony, Hanni Woodbury and Michael K. Foster.

Thomas's wife Yvonne was born in 1944, a member of the Seneca of the Snipe clan,⁷ and has been instrumental in Thomas's efforts. She works as director of *The Jake Thomas Learning Centre*, and takes care of administering, organizing, financing, and developing the programs.

Along with his activities as an instructor of Native culture in 1986, with his wife and others,⁸ he formed the Iroquoian Institute, whose purpose was to facilitate the preservation and dissemination of the various Iroquois

languages and cultures. They had some success, but due to disagreements over management among the board members, this effort ended.⁹ Though Thomas was disappointed, in 1992 he established a new school called *The Jake Thomas Learning Centre* (hereafter called the JTLC). In addition to this, the Thomases established the Friends of the JTLC, a non-profit organization, which both Natives and non-Natives could join, in order to support its work.

The best way to understand Jake Thomas and his work is to know who he is. I would like to quote Michael K. Foster who has known Thomas for more than three decades and prepared a biography on him. Foster writes:

In some circles Jake Thomas is known primarily as a craftsman: a carver of false-face masks and Condolence Council canes, and a manufacturer of horn and turtle rattles, wampum replicas, and other traditional artifacts. But he is also a condoled Cayuga chief (hoyá·ne? or hahsənowá·nəh) of the Iroquois Confederacy, a Longhouse speaker (hahthá·hə?), at one time a Longhouse official or "faithkeeper" (hotríhə·t) at the Onondaga Longhouse on the Six Nations Reserve, a singer (hatrənotha?), a "preacher" of the Code of Handsome Lake (hawənaHsáweHá? Kaiwhí·yo·h), a master of the Condolence Ceremony for mourning a dead chief and installing a successor, and an authority on the KayaneHsra?kó-wah or "Great Law of Peace" of the Confederacy (Foster, 1997).

The so-called false-face mask is the "medicine" mask of the Face Society. This society performs a curing ritual at the Midwinter ceremony and visits various traditionalist households on the Reserve in the spring and fall.¹⁰ The Condolence Council cane is a mnemonic device for reciting all fifty titles of the hereditary Chiefs of the Iroquois Confederacy (Fenton, 1950). The horn and turtle rattles are musical instruments used in the ritual dances at the Longhouse (Conklin and Sturtevant, 1953) is made of beads and used, among other things, for the Condolence ceremony and for consecrating agreements between the Iroquois Confederacy and colonists in colonial times.¹¹ The Iroquois Confederacy consists of the Iroquois Five Nations: Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Seneca. It became the Confederacy of the Six Nations when the Tuscarora joined in it in 1722. The Longhouse speaker delivers the opening and closing thanksgiving addresses and introduces ceremonies. The singer of the Longhouse is a singer who sings rituals songs for the ritual dance on ceremonial occasions. A preacher of the Code of Handsome Lake narrates the life and teachings of the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake, who carried out his prophecies in the late 18th century and who died in 1815 (see Wallace, 1969). The

Condolence Ceremony is used to install a new Chief in place of a deceased one. The Great Law of Peace of the Confederacy is the story of the founding of the Iroquois Confederacy, in which Deganawida, whom the Iroquois call the Peace Maker, disseminated a message of peace and law among the warring Five Nations and united them. Woodbury (1992) translates the longest version of the story of the founding of the Iroquois Confederacy.

From this list, it is quite fair to say that Jacob E. Thomas is a living tradition of the Longhouse, an embodiment of the Native tradition today. Just because he is who he is, he knows that his traditions may disappear into oblivion and he thus feels an urgency to do something to counteract these forces. I will now examine the historical and social background of his concern and efforts.

Historical Background of Thomas's Efforts

William N. Fenton (1951:35-54) has noted that each Iroquois Reserve and Reservation has its own culture and history to some extent. This is especially true of the Six Nations Reserve. Following the American Revolution, those Mohawks and other Six Nations people remaining loyal to Great Britain migrated under Joseph Brant's leadership to the Grand River in southern Ontario where they "rekindled" the fire of the Iroquois Confederacy (see Graymont, 1972). Initially, each nation of the Iroquois had a separate settlement there where the clans were in charge of polity. But due to a series of land sales by the Iroquois to Whites and to the British government, Natives of all six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy resettled in one location and formed one settlement together in the early part of the 19th century. The more acculturated Mohawks however, lived together far from the more conservative Cayugas and Onondagas (see Johnston, 1964). According to Sally M. Weaver, the settlement of people of all six Nations in one village changed the function of the Iroquois Confederacy from a mere diplomatic institution to one with the functions of a domestic government (1994:189).

Through the latter half of the 19th century, the Canadian government demanded through the *Indian Act* the installation of an elective council on every Indian Reserve. Responding to this external pressure, a group of Native men called the Warrior Society attempted to replace the hereditary council of the Iroquois Confederacy with an elective one, though their attempts did not succeed. In the early 20th century, a group of "traditional" minded Longhouse people aggressively demanded that the Canadian government recognize the sovereignty of the Six Nations Reserve. Partly in response to this, the Canadian government decided in 1924 to abolish by force the hereditary council of the Chiefs. They installed an elective

council which was more cooperative with the Canadian Government (Weaver, 1984:247-249).

There are different opinions about the elective council among the hereditary Chiefs today. On one hand, among the liberal Confederacy Chiefs, some have accepted the idea that religion and politics should be kept separate and have even supported the elective system of government (Weaver, 1994:251). On the other hand, following the 1924 takeover, the Confederacy Chiefs continued to hold their own separate meetings. Those traditionalist Chiefs, including Chief Thomas, maintain that the Reserve government should be operated in the traditional way as set forth in the Great Law, insisting that elections are the White man's way. Among them, there is strong sentiment against those who run for office in the elective council system. A person running for office is regarded as deviating from tradition, or to borrow one person's words, as "going out of the circle." Once he does so, that person cannot reenter. Thomas regards the abrogation of the traditional hereditary council with force by the Canadian government as the beginning of cultural deterioration on the Six Nations Reserve.

After the elective council came to office, it changed several policies affecting life on the Reserve. In the area of education, it enforced compulsory schooling and applied provincial standards of education to the Reserve school system.¹² Thomas believes that this contributed to the gradual loss of Native languages and promoted an atmosphere encouraging Native people to speak English and not their own languages. In the area of health and social care, it built a hospital, a nursing home for care of elderly people, and a day-care center for children. Recently, it built a shopping center in the village of Ohsweken, and brought a bank to the Reserve. In business, it now encourages Native people to start their own businesses by providing financial help. Thus, in various ways, it has contributed to the syncretic and acculturating process on the Reserve.

These recent social transformations have had some impact upon the transmission of languages and traditional knowledge within families. From his own childhood experience, Thomas thinks that the family is the locus for the transmission of languages and knowledge from older generations to younger ones. Yet, the recent social form of the family on the Reserve does not allow this to happen. Elderly family members who were the stock of traditional knowledge now live in the nursing home separated from their grandchildren. Small children go to the day-care center while their parents work. Thomas thinks that in this social situation, a school should take the place of family to educate Native children in Native languages and traditional knowledge, yet, the public school on the Reserve is not cooperative towards such a plan. Therefore, Thomas found it necessary to form a private

school, independent from the public school system, where Native teachers teach Native languages and cultures to Native children.¹³ As I mentioned before, he started the Iroquois Institute and later his *The Jake Thomas Learning Centre* to achieve his purpose.

In a sense, Thomas attempts to educate Native children in Native languages so that they will understand ritual addresses and songs at the Longhouse, where only Native languages are allowed to be used. One of Thomas' friend, Mrs. Barbra Galow, tells me that although the number of young people returning to the Longhouse has been increasing recently, these young people do not understand any Native languages, and therefore cannot understand what is going on at the Longhouse rituals. The same is true for the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy, which until recently had only been allowed to be recited in Native languages.¹⁴ Until Thomas broke this traditional regulation in the 1980s (after he had kept it by himself) and began to recite it in English, many Native youths who could speak only English had never heard about it before.

Thomas thus faces insoluble contradictory problems: if he follows the traditional regulations, he will have to see Native languages and Native knowledge disappearing as fewer people are able to maintain and transmit the traditional oral culture. Yet, if he wants to teach today's youth about their own tradition, he has to speak in English to them, and he knows well that English renderings of the traditions are not the best way to teach. Foster has given background explanations of Thomas's efforts:

Underlying Chief Thomas's many involvements is a special concern that Iroquois traditions somehow be passed on to younger Iroquois, fewer and fewer of whom speak the original languages that are the vehicles of those traditions. For him it is not enough to dictate texts to anthropologists and linguists for the sake of scholarship or posterity: urgent steps need to be taken to insure the widest possible dissemination of the old culture. The desire to foster the traditions nevertheless comes up against the stark reality of an accelerating rate of linguistic and cultural loss, and the Native practitioner must choose whether simply to resign himself to the loss, as many do, or to take a more active and sometimes non-traditional approach to keeping the core ideas of the culture alive, including the use of electronic media and translations (Foster, in press).

Comparing today's cultural environment to his own childhood, Thomas emphasizes that, while he himself learned the Native languages, it was in a daily environment of spoken Native languages, in which Elders told the traditional stories in Native languages again and again on various occa-

sions, and children had plenty of opportunity to be exposed to those Native languages. In addition, in those days, a youth could go and ask any Elder to teach him ritual songs and traditional stories. Today, there is neither a cultural environment nor an opportunity for children to be exposed to their Native traditions. In the face of this social situation, Thomas found it urgent and imperative to establish such a cultural and educational environment to allow children to become familiar with both the languages and the traditional stories.

The Jake Thomas Learning Centre

The Jake Thomas Learning Centre is located in Wilsonville, about twenty minutes away from nearby Brandford by car. Thomas used to use the basement room of their house as the classroom, but soon found that he would need a bigger space as this room turned out to be too small when so many people attended his classes. The basement room is now used as the office of the Centre where the Thomas' have electric appliances such as a fax machine, a computer, a tape recorder, a TV set, a camera and other office furniture. In 1994, on some land about 50 meters from his house, the JTLC built a one-room building, about ten by eight meters in size. He has a small farm area beside the building where he grows the "Three Sisters,"¹⁵ that is, corn, beans and squash in season. He holds classes in the afternoon and evening. In the newsletter of the Friends of the JTLC, we can see the goals and objectives of the Centre. I quote them as follows:

1. To establish and operate a Learning Center to preserve, teach and promote the Iroquoian way of life and heritage.
2. To design, develop and maintain a Language Development Program whereby all aspects of the Iroquoian Language can be preserved and taught to all age groups.
3. To establish a series of Cultural Skills Development Courses in order to promote cultural skills.
4. To establish a historical and current Library Resource Centre whereby educators from all over the world can come to research and learn first hand about the history and development of the Iroquoian people.
5. To develop and promote a series of Recreational Skills Workshops in order to introduce the Iroquoian games to all individuals.
6. To carry on educational programs in order to promote the knowledge of Iroquoian Culture and Language through research, education and publication and distribution of books, papers, reports,

periodicals, and pamphlets, and to provide funds to charitable organizations which carry on such educational programs.

What kinds of educational strategies did Thomas develop to achieve these goals? A quick glance at the courses listed in the newsletter of the Friends of the JTLC shows the importance Thomas places on particular areas. A class is usually held once a week. I will list several recurring themes and add fees for some classes as information. In the area of Native language lessons, Mohawk and Cayuga (\$50.00 for member of the Friends of JTLC, \$60.00 for non-member for ten weeks) are taught. Thomas's collaborators, Mrs. Barbra Galow and Mr. Ken Marcle have also taught courses on Cayuga. Other courses offered so far include the corn husk basket workshop, the wampum workshop (taught by Mr. Marcle, \$50.00 for member, \$85.00 for non-member for three days), the headdress workshop, the corn horn workshop and Iroquois Dance instruction (free). With respect to Longhouse religious teaching, Thomas has taught the Code of Handsome Lake (\$50.00 for member, \$80.00 for non-member for ten weeks), the Thanksgiving Address, the Creation Story, the Cycle of Ceremonies and so on. With regard to League traditions, he has taught the Great Law, the Condolence Ceremony, the Condolence Cane, and so on. Beside these Longhouse traditions, the JTLC has offered courses on healing and herbal medicine.

How does Thomas teach his classes? I want to point out several things I noticed while attending his class on the Cycle of Ceremonies for five days in January of 1996.¹⁶ The class was held from nine o'clock in the morning to four o'clock in the afternoon. There were usually ten attendees present at each class, though not always the same ten people came. The total enrollment in the course was close to twenty-five, including those who came only for one day or for a half day. Among those twenty-five or so, non-Natives were relatively few; the majority were Natives. Among Natives, several came from off-Reserve, but from other Iroquois Reserves such as Akwesasne. Most Natives came from the Six Nations Reserve, though those who attended every day, including both Natives and non-Natives (including me), came from off the Reserve since they had travelled from afar and were taking time off, while the Native people on the Reserve could not attend all the time as they had to work.¹⁷

The class is an intensive week-long class, not a typical class offered at JTLC as most classes are held every week for five weeks or ten weeks. According to Thomas, attendance of Native youth on-Reserve is not always high. There are several reasons for this. Many Native youth have to work and cannot get time off easily. Even though some might have time, they could not afford to pay for those classes which are not free.

On the morning of the first day, Thomas had a ritual offering of tobacco for success of his teaching and for the attendees' success in learning Native languages and traditions. All the attendees offered tobacco for their success in learning.

He gave us, the attendees, handout materials before each class. By using a computer, he wrote down the ritual addresses in four languages, Cayuga, Mohawk, Onondaga and English. He read some of these handouts to us. In the classroom, his wife Yvonne sat next to him, and gave assistance to him occasionally. For example, she reminded him about a few things that he did not mention in his explanation. The five-day class was organized according to the cycle of the annual ceremony from the Maple ceremony to the Green Corn ceremony to the Harvest ceremony. He began his class by narrating the creation story and explaining the origin of each ceremony. His knowledge about them came from his own memory. Sometimes, he wandered about around the topic and started to talk about the story which at first did not appear to be related to the issue. But when he returned to the topic, the attendees understood the connections between them. Throughout the class, he was the one to speak, talk to and explain. The students sat quietly and listened to him. When he recited the ritual prayers written in Native Languages, Yvonne used a tape recorder to record his utterance of them. At the end of class, students occasionally asked questions, both related and unrelated to what he had just explained. One of Thomas's collaborators, Mrs. Barbra Galow, videotaped all of his classes.

From this brief example, one can tell that Thomas employs several educational and preservative strategies. First, he derives his teaching method from his knowledge of his oral traditions. In his classroom setting, he tries to transmit his oral knowledge orally, both in English and in Native languages, though I think he hopes to transmit Native knowledge in Native languages only one day. Second, he writes down what he will teach. His teaching materials serve the purpose of both educating and preserving, though he knows the difference between his oral teaching and his written material. Third, he videotapes his teachings so that one day in the future any person can learn from his videotaped teachings.

As to differences between Thomas's oral teaching and his written materials, the presence of an audience is a very important factor in planning and formulating a story to narrate orally. On the one hand, when he is explaining, he pays attention to the audience's reaction to what he has just said and repeats several of the points he wants to emphasize, while he is also thinking about what to say next. Thomas explains that every time he tells a story, he reformulates and reorganizes the story for his audience, but at the same time he emphasizes that he would still tell the "same" story.

On the other hand, when he writes down and fixes his oral narratives, this flexibility of oral culture is lost. Not only is flexibility lost, but also certain features of written culture might damage the oral culture. For example, Thomas needs to organize consciously his written materials without keeping repetitive and additive features of orality.

As to the usefulness of the written materials, Thomas specifies two primary purposes. First, he wants Native youth to use them as an introduction and to familiarize themselves with their own culture. Second, he wants Native youth to use the written and recorded educational material repeatedly by themselves, for now there are few Elders who either know the traditional songs and speeches or who are willing to give time to repeat them for the young people to learn.

To highlight this point, I want to mention two incidents that occurred during my stay. I met a young Native dancer at the inn where I was staying and heard him listening to a music tape of Iroquois social dance songs and practicing singing them. He told me that he listened to the tape repeatedly to learn to sing them.

On another occasion, I bought a tape of the ritual song of the Great Feather Dance Thomas had recorded, and asked Thomas to explain the meaning of the words of the ritual dance. He explained that mainly the ritual song was about the Creation. While explaining the meanings of words to me, he said that occasionally some young men came to him and asked him the meanings of these ritual songs, as I had done, since they did not understand the Native languages. As to the recorded performance, he explained a few things besides just giving me a translation. As we were listening to the tape, we heard the singer on the tape (Thomas himself) repeat the same phrase over again, due to the fact that Thomas had been observing some people coming late into the Longhouse as the recording was made. While we were listening to the tape, suddenly we heard birds (real birds) singing on the tape. Thomas smiled at me and told me that the birds were singing when the singer sang about the Creator's creation of birds.

While he acknowledges that the Longhouse tradition is primarily oral, Thomas is yet aware that without written texts and audio tapes, Native languages and traditions, especially the traditional rituals and mythic narratives, will disappear. He argues that if he does not record his knowledge, what he knows will also disappear with his death. To explain his point, he adds that his father and other Elders belonging to former generations knew much more than he about the rituals, particularly powerful ritual "medicine" and mythic narratives. Those days, people sometimes believed that ritual knowledge should be kept secret among initiated members, as with the

Little Water Medicine Society. However, when the Elders of Thomas' father's generation died, their ritual knowledge often disappeared, too. There is no way even for Thomas to regain that knowledge now. For all these reasons, Thomas tries to record his knowledge of rituals and mythic narratives in both written and audio-visual form so that his knowledge will not be lost forever. He thinks that it is better for traditional knowledge to survive in these forms than not to survive at all.

In preparing their language study materials, Thomas and his wife draw on three Iroquois languages: Mohawk, Cayuga and Onondaga. They made introductory textbooks called *The Tip of the Iceberg* for the first two languages, while for Onondaga language study, they made introductory and intermediate level textbooks.

Compared to the language textbooks written by other Native teachers and linguists, I found that Thomas's allot many pages to ritual speeches. For example, the textbook of an intermediate Onondaga language course included: Ceremonial terms, Thanksgiving Address, Speech for Stirring Ashes Ceremony, Announcing the Bear Dance Ceremony, Repentance for Handsome Lake Preaching, Burning Tobacco for sins, Wake Speeches and so on. This feature of Thomas's textbook shows that he mainly thinks that young people should learn the Native languages in terms of religious tradition and ritual life of the Longhouse, where the core of the Longhouse traditions is found.

Thomas also writes down procedures for performing rituals, for example, the Midwinter Ceremony, as only a handful of Elders who know them are left. Thomas regards Annemarie Anrod Shimony's book *Conservatism among the Iroquois at the Six Nations Reserve*, originally published in 1944 and republished in 1994, very highly because she described the ritual cycle and ritual procedures in detail, and many Native people themselves today are not sure about those aspects of the ritual life. He sincerely worries that soon there won't be anybody who knows the ritual cycle and ritual procedures in detail.

His language textbook is very helpful when used with his assistance. However, without his assistance, his teaching materials are hard to understand. For example, Thomas's materials are not organized progressively from a basic level to a more advance level, and he does not provide very much grammatical and syntactic explanation with exercise sections.¹⁸ For a person who is used to learning to speak a foreign language with the grammar explained and with exercises, his approach could be frustrating.¹⁹ Thomas's approach could be problematic when, for example, other Native teachers use his materials to teach Native languages, because they might not have Thomas's cultural and linguistic background.

Thomas utilizes audio-videos to preserve Iroquois traditions. There are two kinds of video tapes he makes. First are those video tapes which record Thomas's oral teaching in the classroom and oral performances such as his recitation of the Great Law. Thomas has almost all of his classes and his narrative performances videotaped, since every time he narrates the Great Law, his manner of recitation and the construction of the narrative differ. The JTLC tries to record all of his oral performances.

He also makes video-tapes by speaking alone to the machine. For example, in his video of the Cayuga Creation story, he narrates the Creation story in Cayuga by pointing to eight pictures of the scene of the Creation. He says that it is also important to appeal visually these days since many children are accustomed to seeing pictures and images. In the video of the fifteen matters to address for the Condolence Ceremony, Thomas sits down and picks up a wampum string one by one as he narrates each of the fifteen matters in the Mohawk language.²⁰ In the video of the *Hai Hai*, Thomas walks back and forth in the basement room of his house singing the *Hai Hai* song for the Condolence Ceremony.

Because Thomas himself is a hereditary Chief, he also wants to teach and preserve the traditions of the Condolence Ceremony. The fact that the Condolence Ceremony is especially important for a Chief of the Iroquois Confederacy poses several serious problems today.²¹ First, there are supposed to be fifty hereditary Chiefs of the Iroquois Confederacy with titles passed down matrilineally. However, matrilineality was supported by an exogamous clan system, which is today almost gone. Many Native people today do not know to which clan they belong. Second, among the hereditary Chiefs, there are two types: Christian Chiefs and Longhouse Chiefs. Only the latter adhere to the traditional religion. Because the Condolence Ceremony is associated with the Longhouse religion, the non-Longhouse Chiefs found themselves excluded from the Condolence Ceremony. Third, family members of the Chiefs often do not know the Native languages today,²² and they are not so eager to learn them. Thomas announced once a plan to give a class on the Condolence Ceremony, but nobody, including people belonging to the family of the Chieftainship, was interested in attending it.

Thomas is concerned not only with teaching and preserving Native languages and traditions, but also with the well-being of Native society. Among his publications, some address social problems such as alcoholism, family violence, incest and other topics which are also seen in non-Native society. These social problems are also addressed in the Code of Handsome Lake, and Thomas has taught the Code of Handsome Lake several times. In addition, based upon the teachings of Handsome Lake, Thomas

collaborated on a book, *Teachings From the Longhouse* (Thomas and Boyle, 1994).

Several Reactions to Thomas's Efforts

Since Thomas considers his work to be for the benefit of all Natives in his community, it is important to examine some Native responses to his work. There are positive and negative responses. I did not have a chance to interview other Native people in general on the Reserve, but Thomas and his collaborators told me about negative responses he received. Positive responses mostly come from his collaborators and friends.

For them, the sheer presence of the JTLC itself is important. Some of Thomas's collaborators and friends explained to me that as they did not learn anything about their own traditions at school, they wanted to learn them somehow. They didn't know who knew and were willing to teach it, but then they heard about the JTLC and got to know Thomas. A person said that one day she simply passed by the entrance board of the JTLC and became curious about it and went to see Thomas. It was the beginning. Emphasizing that there was no other place like the Centre, many felt that its presence and role was significant in their lives.

Thomas's collaborators and friends list several positive influences of his efforts. First, a few young people grew up to take a leading position in the ritual life. For example, Mr. Ken Marcle, a Cayuga, who has been associated with JTLC for some time, is now responsible for teaching mythic traditions and ritual life at the Longhouse. He also has his own small building beside his house where he carves various crafts of the Longhouse, including condolence canes. He said that he would like to retire from his work as soon as possible so that he would be able to devote himself to teaching and preserving Native traditions.

Second, among the generation of Elders, some people have begun to agree with what Thomas has done for the preservation of their languages and traditions, and have started to take young children to the Longhouse assembly so that they could learn not only Native languages but also the important religious traditions from their Elders.

Third, although I could not objectively observe this, Thomas said that some school teachers on the Reserve are using his teaching and educational materials in the classroom.

There are several negative responses to Thomas's efforts. First, some complained that Thomas violates the traditional regulation that the traditions should be only allowed to be recited in Native languages when he recites the Great Law in English to the younger generations, who could only speak English. Second, he is criticized for writing oral traditions down at all. Some

would say that obscurity and oblivion might be the fate of Native languages and traditions. Third, some people accuse him of "selling" Native traditions, which used to be taught by Elders for free before. Some accuse him of getting "rich" this way.

Thomas and his followers defend themselves by emphasizing that it is of paramount importance to preserve Native languages and traditions, for once these are lost, they will be lost forever. Regarding the first point, Thomas simply responded by saying that because most youth could only understand English, if the Great Law would not be recited in English, Native youth would neither know nor understand their own tradition. As to the third point, Thomas says that it is expensive to run the JTLC, especially as he is old and retired and without any other source of income, though the JTLC has occasionally asked for donations from various institutions and from the Friends of the JTLC, which both Natives and non-Natives can join as members to support the JTLC financially.

Recently, in order to respond to several criticisms about the operation of the JTLC, Thomas and others made an ambitious plan to create an Iroquois Theme Park. One of their new plans is to make a "profit" department to make some income and in return to enable the instructors of the JTLC "to offer workshops and classes free of charge" (The Friends of the JTLC *Newsletter* 9 (1) [1996]). They also want to start a cable TV station so that young children at home can be exposed to Native languages by watching TV. In addition, they want to expand the present building into a larger log building. An architect, William Wentforth, has designed it "to reflect the traditional cosmology of the Hotinonshón:ni culture" (The Friends of the JTLC *Newsletter* 11 (1) [1997]).

Before I conclude this essay, I would like to make a few observations. Thomas's approach to those young people and adults, who are already used to the modern manner of life and school education, might not always be effective for his manner of teaching requires a lot of attention and patience from his audience. Second, the target of the JTLC seems to be very broad, and therefore seems to lose some focus. It might be more efficient to focus on teaching and educating, for example, family and children of the hereditary Chiefs at first in order to create a core group.

Thomas has devoted his time and efforts to preserving and teaching his Native languages and traditions, by both living and drawing on oral traditions and employing modern technology, which often contradicts his own traditions. He told me again and again that he tried to do everything he could do, and that what other Natives and future generations would do with his educational materials totally depends upon them. For a moment, it is necessary to wait to see what his successors would do with his heritage.

Yet, it is too early to determine what fruits Thomas's many efforts will produce for the traditional seven generations to come.

Notes

1. While I was revising this article for publication, I was saddened by the news that Jacob E. Thomas passed away on August 16 of 1998. I would like to express my condolences to his family and friends. I would like to dedicate this paper to him. For this article, I would like to express my gratitude to Jake and Yvonne Thomas and their friends at the Jake Thomas Learning Centre for giving me permission to study his efforts to preserve and teach Native languages and traditions. This paper is a result of my study funded by the Toyota Foundation from 1996 to 1997. I appreciate their financial support. I also deeply appreciated Dr. Michael K. Foster, Emeritus Curator of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, for his comments and suggestions on the earlier draft of this paper. Since he knew Mr. Jacob E. Thomas for more than three decades, I included his insights in various manners. Also, I thank Professor Philip Arnolds of Syracuse University for his comments on the earlier draft. Yet, all comments and arguments expressed in this paper are my sole responsibility.
2. Foster (1982) gives more detailed explanation about the number of speaker and its possible survival rate. "To give the bare statistical facts a more visceral meaning, I have assigned some impressionistic labels to six categories of estimated numbers of speakers, and these categories are color-coded in the table. Languages with fewer than 10 speakers in Canada are *verging on extinction*; those with 10-100 speakers are extremely endangered; those with 100-500 speakers are quite endangered; those with 500-1,000 speakers are endangered; those with 1,000-5,000 speakers have excellent chances of survival in the foreseeable future. There are only three languages in this last category."
3. Foster makes available the list of the texts and other materials Thomas and his wife have made. See Foster, in press.
4. I rely upon Foster's article for Thomas's biographical information here. I will give only an abridged biography of Thomas. For detailed information, please refer to Foster's article (in press).
5. For the Iroquois medicine societies, see Tooker (1986).
6. I do not have more information than this about the grammar school and high school he attended. Thomas told me that his parents encouraged him to attend school so that he would be able to speak English.
7. Traditionally, the Iroquois society was of clan exogamy, therefore marriage between the couple of the same clan was forbidden. Yet, this

practice had become obsolete as the clan affiliation itself became weakened. About the relationship of the Thomas, Foster writes, "Yvonne explains that for many years she thought she was Mohawk and a member of the Turtle clan, since these were the identities of her adoptive mother, and she only discovered her roots as a Seneca and a member of the Snipe clan after she and Jake were married and she had investigated her family history through distant relatives at the Tonawanda Reservation. Foster, op. cit., p.23.

8. Thomas didn't feel comfortable about talking about those others when I asked him who they were. So, I do not know who they were at this point.
9. Foster gives the following information. "In many ways, the recitation of the Great Law in 1992, which was sponsored by the Institute, marked the high point in its development. Soon after that, tensions that had been building between the Thomases and the board of directors over finances and the delegation of authority erupted into a public dispute. which was picked up in the Reserve paper. From that time on, the Thomases announced, in January, 1993, that they had severed all formal links with the Institute." Foster, op. cit., pp.26-27. Thomas told me that those others took all texts and other educational materials he had made at the Iroquois Institute away from him, so he had to remake everything again.
10. The name of "False Face" is a commonly used term, but there is no connotation of "false" or "fake" in the Native term. So it is appropriate to omit a word false. For the "medicine" masks of the Iroquois, see Fenton (1987).
11. Michael K. Foster studies the function of wampum in the negotiation. See Foster (1984).
12. The Mohawk Institute, a residential school, is known to have enforced the compulsory education only on those who attended it.
13. Mr. Ken Marcle, Thomas's friend and collaborator, told me that what Marcle learned at high school had nothing to do with Native cultures and languages and turned out to be useless after graduation. He also pointed out that it would be necessary for Native children to learn their own culture and languages at school through elementary to high.
14. There are several English translations of the foundation of the Iroquois Confederacy available. They were originally narrated in Native languages and translated into English later by American ethnographers, therefore they were not counted as being narrated in English first. See Horatio Hale, *The Book of Rites* and Hanni Woodbury, *Concerning the League*. The English story of the foundation of the Iroquois Confederacy found in Parker was originally compiled by the Six Nations Council

of the Six Nations Reserve in 1900 for the purpose of forwarding it to the Department of Indian Affairs. It was a politically motivated version of the same story. I explored historical background of the same story in my Ph.D. dissertation entitled *The Native Chief's Resistance Through Myth*, submitted to the University of Chicago in 1998. For detail, please refer to it.

15. Beans, corn and squash were traditionally planted together, and therefore called the "Three Sisters" by the Longhouse people.
16. I want to point out that other classes are conducted differently and have different atmosphere, sometimes depending upon who attendants are.
17. After a class, Yvonne Thomas explained that many Native youths worked as teachers at the public school on the Six Nations Reserve. When Thomas had his class on Cycle of Ceremonies, they were in school term, so they could not come to his class every day.
18. Compared, for example, to *Mohawk: A Teaching Grammar*, by Nora Deering and Helga Harries Delisle, published by Kanien'kehaka raotitionhkwa Cultural Center in 1976, which has grammatical explanations and exercises.
19. Thomas has a textbook called *Immersion* for children. For this basic textbook, it is understandable that the textbook does not have enough grammatical and syntactic explanations.
20. Video tape, "Condolence Strings Coming from Four Brothers Side." The Iroquois divides moieties for the ceremonial purpose, Three Brothers Side and Four Brothers Side. The former includes the Mohawks, the Onondagas, and the Senecas while the latter includes the Oneidas, the Cayugas, the Tuscaroras, and the Tutoles.
21. There are two bodies of the Iroquois Confederacy today, one in the United States and the other in Canada. The Iroquois Confederacy in Canada today does not have political power any more since the Canadian government abrogated the hereditary council of the Confederacy in 1924 and enforced the elective council.
22. Mr. Stephen Bombery told me that there were many children of the Chiefs of the Iroquois Confederacy who did not know and speak the Native languages. He was of opinion that if Thomas wanted to Native youths to learn the Native languages and traditions, the Chiefs of the Iroquois Confederacy and their children should be cultural exemplars by learning the speaking the Native languages before they ask others to do so.

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