

A frontier . . . for a long time

By Charles Hogan

Europeans made their presence known along the Kayaderosseras only a few years after Columbus made his discovery voyage in 1492. When George Washington crossed the creek in 1782, he referred to his trip as visiting the frontier. In other words, the Kayaderosseras was a frontier between Europeans and Indians for almost 300 years.

The term Kayaderosseras was the name that the Indians gave to their summer hunting grounds, north of their main settlements in the Mohawk valley.

Archeological evidence shows that agricultural activity and human settlement had taken place for perhaps as long as 8,000 years at the mouth of the creek along Saratoga Lake. The area was near the junction of the two main trade routes of the Northeast - the "war road" that connected the Iroquois with their traditional enemies to the north, the Algonquians, and the great trade route, running through the Hoosic valley, connecting the New England coast with the mid-west.

European goods, and European diseases, moved from fishermen, who came ashore to dry fish caught on the Grand Banks, along the traditional trade routes, to the Kayaderosseras, for over a century before the first fur trading post was established in Albany in 1614.

Although much reduced by disease, Indians still lived in the area until just after the American Revolution. They were protected by English agents interested in promoting the fur trade, and military men who saw the well-organized tribes as useful allies against the French. These agents, especially Sir William Johnson, prevented settlers from using the Kayaderosseras Patent of 1708 to displace the In-

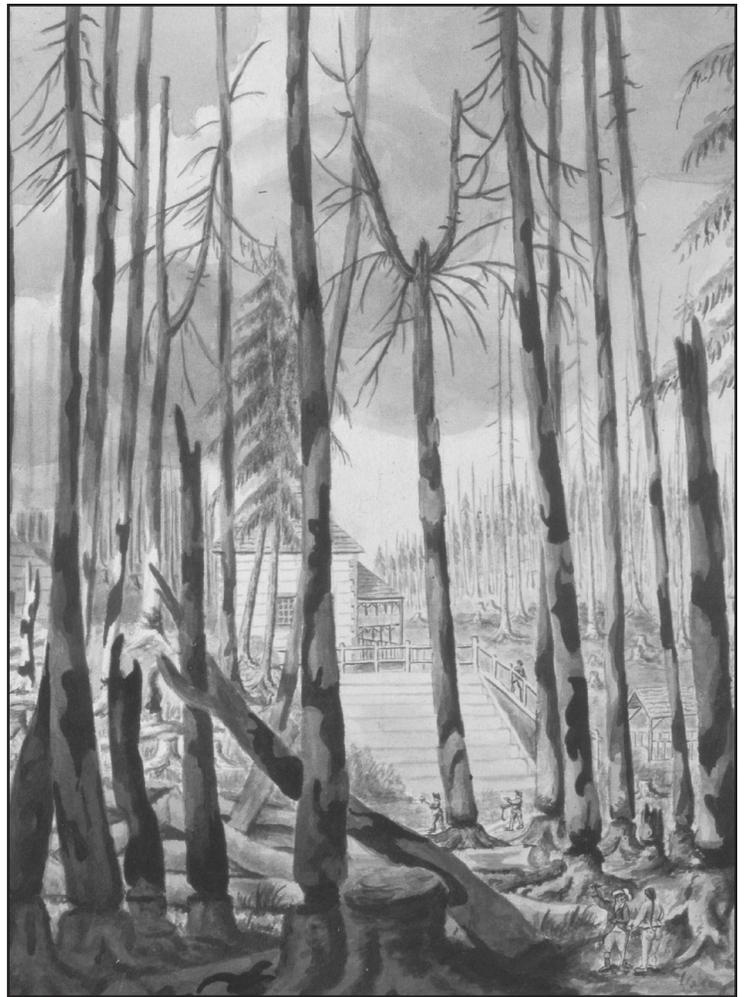
dians. This document said that the Indians had sold their entire hunting grounds to the English, but the Indians, who could not read the document, said that they had been told that they were only selling enough land for a single farm.

The Kayaderosseras provided the Saratoga Lake Indians with a valuable commodity: it was one of the furthest places in-land that enjoyed the benefit of migratory sea fish. Caught in weirs, constructed of woven sticks that spanned the creek, the fish provided protein before the corn grew, and fertilizer to help the corn grow. Early settlers said that weirs could be found as far upstream as Rock City Falls.

An additional resource, which also attracted the English, was the mature stands of timber. Contrary to current perceptions, much of the east coast of North America was open land, not forests, prior to European settlement. The Indians set regular wild fires to clear the brush, aiding their semi-nomadic lifestyle. This practice is how Burnt Hills, just south of the Kayaderosseras, got its name. The creek area, especially around what would become Ballston Spa, was a hemlock and cedar swamp, too wet to burn, but useful for providing lodge poles.

Not surprisingly, the Indians sided with the English during the Revolution, and the long frontier came to an abrupt end soon after Washington's visit. Settlers, now in control of the courts, flooded into the valley.

Fifty years later, the creek was the site of one of the most advanced industrial areas in the world. Everywhere in Europe, the change from Stone Age to Machine Age took thousands of years. Along the Kayaderosseras it took less than a single human lifetime.



Source: New York Historical Society

The earliest view of life along the Kayaderosseras is provided by this line drawing of Ballston Spa, composed by William Strickland in 1794. This part of the Kayaderosseras valley was still a cedar and hemlock swamp. Only recently had Indians been evicted from their ancient homeland. See story on back page.

