On the Hill: A Bicentennial History of Hamilton College

By Maurice Isserman, the James L. Ferguson Professor of History

Chapter 1

To a traveller passing through the Oriskany Valley in the year 1785, the country presented all the indications of an unbroken wilderness. His path was an Indian trail. If he ascended the hill on the west, he looked down upon a sea of forests undulating over the knolls and slopes which diversify the valley, and up the amphitheatre of hills which rise on the east and south. Here and there he saw little wreaths of smoke curling up from Indian wigwams, and perhaps through openings in the trees he caught an occasional glimmer of the Oriskany. Beyond all were the Trenton hills, as blue and serene as now.

— Amos D. Gridley, Class of 1839,
History of the Town of Kirkland, New York (1874)

In July 1793, the Reverend Samuel Kirkland, a resident of a newly established community in Central New York, attended the ordination of a local Protestant minister. It had been six years since the founding of what was then called Clinton settlement and four years since Kirkland moved into a small log cabin at the base of the hill overlooking Oriskany Creek. For nearly a quarter-century prior to moving to Clinton, he had served as a missionary to the Oneida Indian tribe, whose principal settlement was 15 miles to the west. He found it heartening, he wrote in his journal, that:

> *"this place, which six years ago was in a state of nature, a mere wilderness should so suddenly appear like the garden of Eden, the fields around us whitening for harvest or clad with verdure. And in addition to this, songs of praise & hallelujahs ascending from this once howling wilderness to God & the lamb that a Church of Christ is here planted."*[1]

Earlier that year, in January, Kirkland met with President George Washington and Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton in Philadelphia, then the nation's capital, and secured their endorsement (and Hamilton's name) for a school for Indian and white children he proposed to establish in Clinton. When the Hamilton-Oneida Academy opened its doors to its first class of students in 1794, it provided further evidence that the region was no longer the "howling wilderness" Kirkland encountered when he set off on his mission to the Oneidas in the 1760s.

The school that Samuel Kirkland founded on a hilltop above the valley of the Oriskany was a small one, and so it would remain (relatively speaking) through later incarnations. But the changes that the coming years brought to the school were bound up with a much larger history — local, regional and national. Ideas and actions often lead to developments beyond the intent and imagination of their initiators, and the history of the Hamilton-Oneida Academy, reborn a few years after Kirkland's death as Hamilton College, is no exception. This book is an account of Kirkland's errand into the wilderness and its consequences throughout the next two-and-a-half centuries of American history.

Note: Chapter 1 of *On the Hill: A Bicentennial History of Hamilton College* tells the story of the Rev. Samuel Kirkland, missionary to the Oneida Indians and founder of the Hamilton-Oneida Academy, which became Hamilton College in 1812.

A State of Nature

Oriskany Creek, a wide, shallow tributary of the Mohawk River carved by glaciers, has its headwaters near Prospect Hill in the present-day town of Stockbridge in Central New York's Madison County. From there it flows 31 miles before emptying into the Mohawk River, which carries its waters eastward to the Hudson River and then south to empty into the Atlantic Ocean.

The creek has its own complicated history, played out over thousands of years of climatic and geological change. It flows south for several miles before turning and flowing north the rest of the way to the Mohawk. Its uppermost south-draining section once flowed into the Chenango River, which in turn emptied south into the Susquehanna River. But when the continental ice sheet advanced over the region 20,000 years ago, it diverted the drainage of many streams, including the Oriskany. Today, the uppermost course of the Oriskany was inherited from the time before the last Ice Age, whereas the main section, north of present-day Solsville and Oriskany Falls, developed after glaciers last visited and then departed from the region.

To a geologist's practiced eye, signs of glaciation in the Oriskany Valley are easily recognized.[2] As the climate warmed, the glacier that carved the valley naturally retreated northward. But it did so by fits and starts, not in a steady recession. For many years, it halted and stood with its snout just south of the village of Oriskany Falls. Here, the voluminous melt-water from the ice deposited a moraine, the Valley Heads Moraine, which fills the valley like a thick blanket south to Madison and beyond.

As the ice sheet continued to melt, it halted again, this time near the Dugway south of the village of Clinton, where for many decades it formed a glacial lake. As the ice beneath the lake thinned, crevasses opened, into which streams poured and deposited significant amounts of sand and gravel. Today, these isolated deposits, or kames, are small hills dotting the flat valley floor, such as Christmas Knob on Clinton's Norton Avenue.

Beneath the glacial carvings and deposits lies a trove of much older geological history: sedimentary layers and formations of the Paleozoic Era, part of the classic sequence of richly fossiliferous formations in Central New York. In the Clinton area, 400 million-year-old limestones, sandstones and red shales of the Silurian Period are near the surface. One of these formations, a three-foot layer of red hematitic iron ore, proved ideal for manufacturing paint pigment and cast iron, and sustained for a half-century a local mining industry along Brimfield Street and an iron-ore furnace in what is today Franklin Springs.

Early sidewalks and driveways in the Clinton area were made of chips of the dusky red Vernon shale, a product of deposition in the shallow Silurian seas when the climate was arid. Traced eastward to Syracuse and Rochester, the Vernon shale and its overlying layers, named the Salina Group, give way to one of the country's great deposits of salt — a resource first taken advantage of by Native Americans who boiled brine from local salt springs. In the 19th century, the newly dug Erie Canal would become known as "the ditch that salt built" because tons of the valuable substance would be dug up and shipped on canal barges from the Syracuse region to New York City.

As the last of the Ice Age glaciers retreated 15,000 years ago, plants and animals began to establish themselves in the flat plain bisected by the Oriskany Creek and enclosed by the two low ridges that define the landscape in which the village of Clinton would eventually nestle. Dense forest took root in the rich topsoil, replacing the original tundra and open grasslands. In time, it would include rock, scarlet, black, striped bark and mountain maple; white, red and cork bark elm; white and black ash; white and red beech; and black and yellow birch, along with wild poplar, wild cherry, hemlock, white pine and the occasional tulip tree. In the shelter of the forest canopy and along the creek banks, black bears, deer, elk, caribou, moose, mountain lions, wolves, red foxes, lynx, wol-verines, beavers, weasels, rabbits, skunks, raccoons, muskrats, squirrels, chipmunks and woodchucks variously rambled, skittered, bounded and skulked. Brook trout and yellow perch

spawned, swam and splashed in the creek. Eagles, hawks, peregrine falcons, owls, bluebirds, blackbirds, blue jays, kingfishers, meadowlarks, sparrows, robins, plovers, wrens, woodpeckers and wild pigeons filled the skies. And in the insect world, among a multitude of more benign species, the region was infested with mosquitoes and black flies.

The People of the Long House

By the time Samuel Kirkland arrived in the region in the late 18th century, it had been thousands of years since "a state of nature" or a "mere wilderness" prevailed in Central New York. Somewhere around 10,000–12,000 B.C.E., before hardwood forests established themselves, small nomadic bands of what anthropologists call Paleoindians came to the tundra to hunt caribou, using spears tipped with chipped flint points. Developing more sophisticated tools and weapons, around 9,000 B.C.E., Paleoindian culture gave way to the Archaic culture, based on hunting and gathering. About 1,000 B.C.E., as the hardwood forests spread and matured, the Archaic culture in turn was replaced by Woodland culture, when Native Americans learned to fashion clay pots and to supplement their diets of meat, berries, seeds and wild plants by planting and harvesting crops such as squash and, later, corn and beans (the famous "three sisters" of Native American agriculture). Permanent, or at least long-lived, settlements took shape in the centuries that followed, some with hundreds of residents. Their inhabitants would stay in one place until game became scarce, firewood was used up or soil fertility waned.

Sometime around 1,000 C.E., a new culture known as Iroquoian appeared in the region, though anthropologists debate about whether it grew out of the local Woodland culture or was imported by migrants. The Iroquois often fought amongst themselves as well as with non-Iroquois neighbors. But sometime in the early 1500s, before the arrival of Europeans, five tribes — the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga and the Seneca — formed a confederacy. When the Europeans encountered the Iroquois, they called this loosely knit league the Five Nations. In the early 1720s, when the Tuscarora tribe joined the Iroquois, the league became known as the Six Nations.

In the 1700s, the Iroquois confederation, some 10,000 in number, occupied a strategic borderland between two rival European empires, with the French to the north and west, and the British to the south and east. Between 1689 and 1763, Britain and France fought four wars: three began in Europe over issues of dynastic succession and spread to North America, while the fourth began in North America and spread to Europe, Africa and Asia. The first three wars, though costly in lives and treasure, ended inconclusively; the fourth, which we know today as the French and Indian War (1754–63), proved decisive. The conflict was fought along and for control of frontier waterways: the Lake George and Lake Champlain corridor; the Hudson, Richelieu and St. Lawrence rivers; and, at the heart of Iroquois territory, the Mohawk River.

In the final struggle between the two foreign empires, many Iroquois supported the British against the French — but insisted that they did so as an allied nation, not as subjects of the British Crown. The distinction was crucial. When the war ended, the loyalties of the Iroquois remained uncertain. Western Indians, including the Senecas (westernmost of the six Iroquois tribes), launched a series of attacks in 1763 on British outposts in a border war known as Pontiac's Rebellion. In an effort to control whites living in the British colonies along the Atlantic coastline, as well as Indians who lived in what had formerly been French or disputed territory in the interior, the British government issued a decree that forbade its colonists from settling west of the crest of the Appalachian Mountains, a line extended northward through Iroquois territory between the Mohawks and Oneidas. But white fur traders, land speculators and ordinary farmers seeking new lands continued to encroach on Iroquois territory. The treaty would be revised several times in the years to come, most dramatically in 1768 when the Iroquois agreed in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix to a new dividing line much farther to the west. Part of this revised boundary, known as the 1768 Line of Property, would run on a northwest to south-

east angle through present-day Clinton, as commemorated by a marker on College Hill Road. In the midst of this tension and uncertainty on the New York frontier, a devout young man named Samuel Kirkland walked unannounced into a Seneca village in the winter of 1765.

Samuel Kirkland, Student

Samuel Kirkland was born on December 1, 1741, the son of Daniel and Mary Kirtland, tenth of their 12 children. Family tradition traced the Kirtlands' origins to Scotland. As a young man, Samuel changed the spelling of his family name from Kirtland to Kirkland; the word "Kirk," Scottish for church, may have been his inspiration for making the alteration in 1769. This is, in any case, the version of the Kirtland genealogy preserved in a book by Samuel Kirkland Lothrop, Kirkland's grandson and first biographer. However, a recent biographer, Christine Sternberg Patrick, has questioned this alleged Scottish ancestry. She traces the Kirkland/Kirtland roots in the New World instead to Nathaniel Kyrtland, one of two English brothers who arrived as settlers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1635.[3]

Daniel, grandson of Nathaniel and father to Samuel, graduated from Yale College in 1720. Like most of the few young men who attended college in the colonies in that era, he aspired to the Protestant ministry. At the time of Samuel's birth, his father was pastor to the Third Congregational Church of the town of Norwich in southeastern Connecticut. This was a moment of fervent religious enthusiasm in New England known as the Great Awakening. "New Light" ministers such as Jonathan Edwards (a Yale classmate of Daniel Kirtland's) thought their parishioners had slid away from the fierce piety of the founding generation of Puritans, allowing nominal church members to go through the motions of religious devotion without ever undergoing a genuine conversion.

The Great Awakening's revivals were intended to challenge such spiritual complacency. A few months before Samuel Kirkland's birth, Edwards delivered the most famous sermon of the era, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," with its terrifying image of a wrathful Supreme Being dangling the souls of sinners over hellfire, like "a spider, or some loathsome insect." Like Edwards, Daniel Kirtland was sympathetic to New Light teachings, although neither of them went as far as some radical revivalists who gave absolute priority to revelation rather than reason, and feeling rather than thought. Like their 17th-century Puritan ancestors, moderate revivalists like Edwards and Kirtland favored an educated ministry, capable of appealing to the head as well as the heart. But they opposed the dry formalism that had become the norm in many churches; they wanted a faith at once reasonable and heartfelt.

Although growing up a minister's son in 18th-century New England would ordinarily assure a boy a sense of secure social status, young Samuel Kirkland knew a troubled childhood. Details are scanty, but his father Daniel apparently suffered from a mental disorder, leading to dismissal from the church in Norwich in 1753 when Samuel was 12. Two years later, the family relocated to Groton, Connecticut, on Long Island Sound, where his father took over a new pulpit. But after another two years passed, Daniel was once again fired, and the family returned to its farm in Norwich.

The future prospects of the son of a father thus twice disgraced and increasingly poverty-stricken were not good. But in October 1760, a few months short of Samuel's 19th birthday, the Reverend Eleazar Wheelock rescued the young man from his probable future as an obscure New England farmer by enrolling him tuition-free in the school he ran for Indian children in Lebanon, Connecticut. Wheelock served as a benefactor and mentor to Kirkland, educating and shaping him for a high purpose. As he wrote in a letter to the prominent evangelical minister George Whitefield the following year, "I have taken a pious Youth [,] son to the Rev. Mr. Kirtland of Norwich [,] into this School as a Charity Schollar; who is fitting as fast as he can to accompany my Indian Boys on a Mission to distant Tribes."

Wheelock, born in 1711 in Windham, Connecticut, was, like Daniel Kirtland, a third-generation native-born New Englander, and, also like him, a graduate of Yale College who had gone on to the ministry. He was ordained as the pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Lebanon, Connecticut, in 1735. He preached in many communities rather than from this single pulpit, establishing a reputation throughout New England as a leading New Light proponent. But his career took an unexpected twist late in 1743 when he became mentor to a 20-year-old Mohegan named Samson Occom, a Christian convert who aspired to preach the Gospel to his own people.

Occom spent four years in Eleazar Wheelock's household, studying the Bible and learning English, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. In 1759, Occom was ordained a Presbyterian minister. Impressed by his student's intellectual abilities, piety and dedication, and seeing him as a model for others, Wheelock decided that the recruitment and training of a generation of Indian missionaries provided the key to the conversion of the frontier's heathen masses. Rather than bringing Christian Indians to live together in the vicinity of white neighbors, as his predecessors had attempted to do in the praying towns of the 17th century, Wheelock's new "Great Design" was to recruit Indian children and take them far away from their homes and parents to attend his school as boarders. Upon completion of their education, they would return to their native villages on the frontier as Christian teachers, carrying "the Gospel into the wilds of America."

Wheelock's school opened in 1755 in Lebanon, a small farming community in the upper Thames Valley of eastern Connecticut. It enjoyed financial support from a number of sponsors, including the evangelical Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), represented in New England by boards located in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Wheelock's name was not attached to the school; instead it was known as Moor's Indian Charity School, named for the local farmer who donated the land on which it sat. In the 1750s, the Indian students came from tribes living in New England and New Jersey, many of them already long exposed to Christian preaching. But British victories in the French and Indian War, with the fall of Quebec in 1759 and Montreal the following year, made it possible for Wheelock to undertake a more ambitious project: the conversion of the distant and fiercely independent Iroquois along the New York frontier.

This was the moment when Samuel Kirkland arrived at Moor's Indian Charity School. Apart from Samson Occom, Kirkland proved Wheelock's greatest success. Wheelock decided to recruit a small cadre of white students who could work in tandem with his Indian missionaries on the frontier. Of the eight whites attending the school in the 1760s, Kirkland alone would devote his entire life to Wheelock's dream of bringing the Iroquois within the Christian fold.

In Kirkland's second year at Moor's School, he was joined by a new classmate, an 18-year-old Mohawk named Joseph Brant. Wheelock, eager to extend his mission to the Iroquois, had dispatched Samson Occom and another of his students, David Fowler, a Montauk Indian, on a recruiting trip to the Mohawk Valley in 1761. Brant was one of three Mohawks whom Occom and Fowler persuaded to attend Wheelock's school, and he was an especially prized recruit because of his ties to Sir William Johnson, British superintendent for Indian affairs for the northern colonies. From his home in the Mohawk Valley, Johnson had carefully tended Iroquois-British relations for decades. Brant's sister Molly was Johnson's common-law wife and had already given birth to the first of eight children she would have with him. Brother and sister were both destined to play influential roles in the future of the Iroquois.

Although born Irish-Catholic, Johnson had converted early in life to the Church of England. As a staunch Anglican and an agent of the Crown, he was suspicious of the dissenting and cantankerous New England Presbyterian and Congregational ministers; in the absence of Anglican missionaries, however, he was initially sympathetic to Wheelock's proposal to spread the Gospel among the Iroquois. So it was with his blessings that Brant began his studies at Moor's School in August 1761. The two other Mohawk students, desperately homesick once they reached Lebanon, departed in late October. Brant was happy to remain at the school, but

he had been promised when he came that he would be able to pay a visit home after a few months. And so he set off on horseback in November, accompanied by Samuel Kirkland who had instructions from Wheelock to recruit more "likely Boys" for the school.

The two rode first to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, then on to Albany and Schenectady, New York, continuing west along the Mohawk River until they reached Johnson's home near present-day Amsterdam — a journey of roughly 300 miles. It was Kirkland's first trip outside Connecticut, and it probably seemed a great adventure. Johnson welcomed the young man cordially and had "a good deal of Conversation" with him about "the Present State & Disposition of the Indians" in New York. Kirkland found two more Mohawks willing to accompany him back to Lebanon. Johnson sent him home with a letter to Wheelock, dated November 17, 1761, saying that he greatly approved of Kirkland's "intention of learning the Mohawk language … as after acquiring it he could, when qualified, be of vast service to them as a clergyman, which they much want and are very desirous of having." On his return to school, Kirkland devoted himself to his studies, with Brant helping him with his study of Mohawk.

The following year, 1762, saw Kirkland embark on a new journey, this time to the College of New Jersey (an institution that would become better known after it changed its name to Princeton). The Reverend Wheelock continued to invest his donors' money in Kirkland's future by paying his tuition and board (17 pounds, seven shillings and sixpence per year). At the college, Kirkland lived in Nassau Hall, as did the rest of the school's enrollment of just over a hundred students. Founded 16 years earlier, the college was only the fourth institute of higher education chartered in North America. (Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale all preceded it.) Like its predecessors, the College of New Jersey was intended first and foremost to train ministers, its faculty closely aligned with the New Light advocates within the Presbyterian Church. Kirkland arrived for the winter term of 1762–63, and was allowed to register as a sophomore, probably as a mark of respect to his mentor. As Kirkland reported to Wheelock in a letter dated January 20, 1763, "I recite with my class in Geography; in the Greek Testament at present by myself to Sm. Blair, our Tutor; I shall likely joyn with [the sophomores] in Longinus, in the Spring; and in those Latin Authors, which they shall study."

Kirkland remained at the College of New Jersey for two years. And then, at his mentor's request, he skipped his senior year. Wheelock needed to show his patrons that he was making progress in the conversion of the Iroquois: Samuel Kirkland, soon to be dispatched to live with the Senecas, would be his prize exhibit.

Samuel Kirkland, Missionary to the Senecas

In October 1764, Kirkland and another Wheelock student, a Delaware named Joseph Woolley, left Connecticut bound for the Mohawk Valley in New York. Sir William Johnson welcomed them to Johnson Hall, the baronial mansion he had built for himself near Johnstown, New York, following Kirkland's previous visit. Woolley soon departed to assume duties as schoolteacher to Oquaga, a village on the Susquehanna River composed primarily of Oneidas and Tuscaroras. Kirkland stayed on as Johnson's guest for the remainder of the year, waiting for acceptable escorts into Seneca territory. During this time, Johnson instructed him on Seneca customs and politics. Although that knowledge would serve him well, the delay meant Kirkland would be setting off to cross several hundred miles of wilderness in the dead of winter.

Nothing in Kirkland's life prepared him for the physical hardships to come, making his perseverance in the ensuing months all the more notable. As he prepared for his departure, Kirkland wrote to Wheelock urging him to "Pray for God's infinite Condescension to improve a Creature so vile and unfit for his service." Kirkland was understandably apprehensive about what awaited him, concluding moodily, "Perhaps I may be killed in my first attempt." On a day in mid-January 1765, Kirkland took "affectionate leave" of Sir William Johnson, and with two Seneca guides, he left for the village of Kanadasega (present-day Geneva, New York). It was a

journey of nearly 200 miles along the Indian trail that would later be known as the Seneca Turnpike, or Route 5. "The snow was very deep & dry, supposed to be four feet," he wrote in his journal. "After we had passed the German flatts [present-day Herkimer, New York], was obliged to put on my snow shoes. I carried my pack of provisions, with a few articles of clothing & a few books, the whole not weighing more than 40 lbs."

The three men stopped by Kanonwalohale, the main Oneida Indian settlement (present-day Oneida Castle, New York). The Oneidas, Kirkland noted, "proposed my tarrying with them till the spring" (which, as things turned out, would have been a good idea), but he felt he had to carry on with his mission. Two days later the party stayed with the Onondaga Indians at their village near present-day Syracuse. The trek took a toll on Kirkland; unaccustomed to walking on snowshoes, his ankles swelled, and he tripped and fell over hidden logs and other obstacles.

Kirkland carried with him a message from Johnson, urging his friendly treatment by the Senecas, and a wampum belt, a symbol of peaceful intent. He would need Johnson's endorsement, for his mission was both risky and unprecedented. The Senecas had only recently agreed to lay down the tomahawks they had wielded against British soldiers in Pontiac's Rebellion, and no Protestant missionary in the British colonies in North America had ever ventured into so distant a frontier. The success of Kirkland's mission to the Senecas would be a coup for Wheelock's school, and Wheelock quickly (and prematurely) proclaimed it a triumph. In a letter to a wealthy patroness in England in May 1765, he boasted:

> *[A] young English gentleman, Samuel Kirkland, I sent last fall to winter with the numerous and savage tribe of the Senecas, in order to learn their language, and fit for a mission among them; where no missionary has hitherto dared to venture. This bold venture of his, which considered in all the circumstances of it, is the most extraordinary of the kind I have ever known, has been attended with abundant evidence of a divine blessing.*

Kirkland, unfortunately, knew better. The abundance of divine blessings that Wheelock believed had showered down upon his mission included neither a particularly friendly reception by the Senecas nor nearly enough in the way of physical sustenance. An early frost the previous fall, as well as the upheaval of a decade of war, had already reduced the tribe to meager rations. The addition of another mouth to feed in the middle of winter could not have been welcomed. Still, on arrival, he went through the customary adoption ceremony as an honorary member of the Senecas, was thanked by the tribe's head sachem for displaying "so much love for Indians as to undertake this long journey & at such a season of the year," and was assigned a host family who took him into its home. But, four days after his arrival in the village, his host father suddenly died, and Kirkland came under suspicion of witchcraft to cause the man's death. The burial feast for his host father involved heavy drinking, and Kirkland's host family worried for his well-being should some rum-besotted mourner seek to harm him. He spent several nights hidden in the woods before his protectors deemed it safe for him to return.

In the weeks that followed, Kirkland applied himself to recording Seneca customs in his journal and learning the Seneca language. As he had at Moor's School, he again proved himself a diligent student, notwithstanding the difficult circumstances in which he was now living: "I request them whenever they hear me give a bad pronunciation to any word in their language to correct me & to repeat the correction or amendment till I give the true indian pronunciation."

It proved a hungry winter for Kirkland, who subsisted on dishes such as squirrel broth and acorns fried in bear grease. By April, he needed a respite and returned eastward, this time traveling by canoe across Oneida Lake with his host family. When he reached the British fort at the lake's eastern shore, he was greeted hospitably by the commander and invited to dinner. He wolfed down a leg of lamb at the commander's table so quickly that, afterward, "I was obliged to step aside & emit a considerable part of my excellent dinner to my great grief

and mortification." A few days later, he arrived at Johnson Hall. "Good God!, Mr. Kirkland," Sir William exclaimed, appalled at the appearance of the half-starved young missionary, "you look like a whipping post."

Kirkland could point to no great successes in his first season among the Iroquois, and he complained that the Senecas treated him "with no more respect than they would shew to a dog." But he dutifully returned to their village in June. There he devoted himself to writing a dictionary and grammar of the Seneca language (a work unfortunately lost to posterity). Suspicions of his guilt for his host's sudden death the previous January lingered among the Senecas, and some were openly hostile to the young missionary. And his attempts to persuade his hosts to embrace peaceful relations with neighboring tribes (a key element of British policy for pacifying the frontier) merely irritated them. One chief complained that if they followed Kirkland's advice, "They would soon lose all their martial spirit & be no better than dutch negroes who stooped down to milk cows & went to hoe in the corn fields, an employment proper only for women."

In May 1766, summoned by Wheelock, Kirkland returned to Connecticut where he was ordained a minister and commissioned a missionary by the Connecticut Board of the SSPCK. Wheelock had originally hoped Kirkland would return to the Senecas, but Kirkland apparently persuaded him he would be more successful if he relocated his efforts to another tribe. The previous year, in September 1765, Kirkland received his degree in absentia from the College of New Jersey. His study of the Seneca language and customs was counted as the equivalent of his last year of schooling — which may well count as the first "study abroad" year recorded in the history of American higher education.

Samuel Kirkland, Missionary to the Oneidas

Kirkland left Lebanon once again in July, returning to the New York frontier. On July 23, 1766, he arrived in Kanonwalohale, the Oneida village he had first passed through en route to his Seneca posting a year-and-a-half earlier. Samuel Kirkland, a few months short of his 25th birthday, had found his destiny. For the remaining four decades he had to live, his life and that of the Oneida tribe would be bound together.

Kirkland would complain often in the years to come about the inadequate support he received from Wheelock and other patrons. Still, his circumstances were far better among the Oneidas than they had been during the hungry year he spent with the Senecas; in his first year at Kanonwalohale, he built a log cabin (12 feet by 12 feet in dimensions), planted a garden and kept a cow. Over time, Kirkland developed a circle of Oneida and Tuscarora assistants to help him in his teaching and pastoral work, in addition to the white and Indian schoolmasters sent by Wheelock before the Revolutionary War. One of these aides was Good Peter, an Oneida warrior and devoted Christian who was in his 60s and would prove an especially loyal and useful friend. There were no white neighbors in the immediate vicinity, but only a day's journey separated Kirkland from the military outpost of Fort Stanwix (in present-day Rome, New York), to which he could turn for help or supplies in time of need.

Because he was one of the first Presbyterian missionaries to live among North American Indians on a distant frontier, Kirkland had few models for how to conduct himself amongst his new parishioners. During his first year at Kanonwalohale, he tried to assimilate to Indian ways. He dressed in Oneida clothing, wearing a leather shirt and breeches, and toiled in his own garden. But after a year of this, he concluded his show of egalitarianism was counterproductive, for his "mean, starving, beggarly Method of Life" had left the Oneidas with "a very poor Opinion of the English religion." He resumed wearing English clothing and announced that henceforth he would devote all of his efforts to preaching. If the Oneidas wished to keep him in their midst, they would have to help provide for him, just as an English settlement would support its minister. Unfortunately for Kirkland, this support was never fully realized. Still, he was able to report that the Oneidas had come to treat him with "great Respect, Love, and Affection."

Kirkland devoted himself to learning the language of the Oneidas, and as he became proficient he began delivering his sermons in that language. On Sundays, he would speak for two or three hours at a stretch, often twice daily, attracting hundreds of listeners. He preached the Gospel according to his New Light training and beliefs, urging his listeners to accept Jesus Christ as their savior. One Oneida told Kirkland, "I thought my heart would have broken & fell in pieces when I thought of God's giving his only Son, Jesus Christ, for us, & even us poor Indians."

Accepting Christ required the renunciation of sin, and intemperance was one Kirkland frequently preached against. Over the years, the Iroquois benefited in many ways from trade with whites, acquiring firearms, brass pots, iron ax heads and other useful items. But the taste they acquired for the white man's rum had devastating effects on individuals and tribes. Like most contemporary New Englanders, Kirkland had enjoyed drinking rum now and then. (His account book when he was a student at Princeton recorded his purchase of a quart of rum for one shilling, four pence.) But he would drink no alcoholic beverages while he was among the Oneidas, except for medicinal purposes, and he launched a crusade to put an end to drinking by the tribe. Among his first converts was John Skenandoa, a respected and venerable chief in his 60s. About a decade before Kirkland came to the Oneidas, Skenandoa had drunk himself into a stupor on a visit to Albany, waking up naked in the street after selling his clothing for rum. Horrified and humiliated, he renounced all use of alcohol thereafter and was thus sympathetic to Kirkland's crusade against it. A convert to Christianity before Kirkland's arrival, Skenandoa became a close friend and ally.

Not all Oneidas found Kirkland as persuasive. Once, early in his ministry, Kirkland confiscated a flask of rum from a drunken woman and poured it onto the ground. He was shocked when she fell to her knees "& licked up what was not soaked into the Earth with many Imprecations against the cruel Minister." The next day, her aggrieved husband showed up on his doorstep. As Kirkland reported in a letter to Reverend Wheelock, he "reasoned with him to the utmost of my Ability upon Temperance, Righteousness, & Judgement to come." The man went away but returned the next day, this time drunk himself, and grabbed Kirkland by the throat. Fighting for his life, Kirkland wrestled the man to the ground with the help of a friendly onlooker and bound his attacker's hands behind his back. Humiliated, his assailant threatened bloody vengeance, but Kirkland held his ground and continued his campaign against rum-drinking. He was pleased to report some months later that his attacker had "made a public Confession in a most humble manner with Tears."

By decade's end, Kirkland had settled comfortably among the Oneidas. Evidence of his influence was easily seen in Kanonwalohale, which in some ways began to resemble a white village more than a traditional Iroquois settlement. In 1773, the Oneidas built a frame church that would not have looked out of place on a New England green (even less so the following summer when they added a steeple complete with a bell donated by Sir William Johnson). The village also boasted a school, a sawmill, a gristmill and a blacksmith shop. Frame clapboard houses began going up in Kanonwalohale, replacing some of the old long houses, and the Oneidas acquired oxen and iron plows to till their fields.

Kirkland's life was changing as well. In September 1769, on a return visit to Connecticut, he married Reverend Wheelock's 25-year-old niece, Jerusha Bingham. In 1770, while temporarily staying at the home of Nicholas Herkimer in the white outpost on the Mohawk River known as German Flatts, Jerusha gave birth to twin boys, George Whitefield Kirkland and John Thornton Kirkland, who would be joined in the next dozen years by siblings Jerusha, Sarah, Eliza and Samuel, Jr.

Kirkland's building projects and the charity he extended to individual Oneidas required far more money than the meager stipend he received from the funds allocated to Wheelock by the Connecticut board of the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. So, in 1770, he set out to find additional income for his mission. He was able to secure a more generous stipend from the Boston board of the same society and additional funds from the Corporation of Harvard College. Kirkland's success, ironically, cost him his

mentor; Wheelock now regarded the missionary as a rival rather than a dutiful protégé. Kirkland also disappointed Wheelock by failing to send along the promised stream of recruits for his school in Lebanon since the Oneidas preferred that Kirkland teach their children in their own villages, where they could learn some of the white man's ways and skills without sacrificing their own culture. Kirkland was the only one of the white and Indian pupils Wheelock dispatched as missionaries and schoolteachers to the Iroquois in the 1760s who remained active on the New York frontier in 1771, when Kirkland and Wheelock signed a formal agreement of separation.

Wheelock meanwhile had decided to move his own school from Lebanon, Connecticut, to Hanover, New Hampshire. There, in 1769, he opened a college named after the second Earl of Dartmouth, one of his English benefactors. Dartmouth College, the ninth college founded in the British colonies in North America, was supposedly dedicated to Indian education, just like its Connecticut predecessor. But only two of the 30 students in Dartmouth's entering class were Indians. The Mohegan minister Samson Occom, who had helped to raise a large sum of money for Moor's Indian Charity School while on a speaking tour of England a few years earlier, was outraged when he learned that Wheelock attempted to use this money in building Dartmouth College. He found it unacceptable "that the Indian was converted into an English school & that the English had crowded out the Indian youths." The Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge denied Wheelock use of the money raised in England and instead diverted some of it to Kirkland's mission.

Samuel Kirkland, Patriot

As the missionaries squabbled amongst themselves, a more consequential conflict was developing in the British colonies in North America. Determined to recoup some of the costs of fighting the French and Indian War and the ongoing costs of maintaining garrisons in the New World, the British government levied a series of new taxes on American colonists, prompting the Stamp Act Crisis of 1765, the Boston Massacre of 1770 and the Boston Tea Party of 1773. While bands of Liberty Boys roughed up Crown officials and housewives spun their own cloth in a boycott of British imports, local patriot militias began to stockpile arms and ammunition. The contagion of rebellious sentiments spread throughout the colonies, including northern New York, and by 1774, Committees of Correspondence were established throughout the colonies to coordinate resistance to recent British policies. Many residents of the settlements along the Mohawk River were patriot sympathizers. Sir William Johnson's death by a stroke in July 1774 was fortunate from the patriot perspective, for Johnson was an experienced military commander with a strong personal following among the Iroquois and would have proven a formidable foe. But his successor as superintendent of Indian affairs, nephew Guy Johnson, was equally devoted to the Crown. And Joseph Brant, William Johnson's protégé and Kirkland's old classmate, was committed to securing Iroquois allegiance to Britain, fearing that if the colonies gained independence, a wave of white settlers would encroach further into Iroquois territory.

As a native New Englander, a member of a dissenting church and a graduate of the College of New Jersey (another hotbed of anti-British sentiment), Kirkland was drawn to the patriot cause. By 1774, he was sharing news of the deliberations by the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia with his Oneida congregation, much to Guy Johnson's disapproval. On April 4, 1775, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress sent a message by dispatch to Kirkland to pass on to the Mohawks, asking them to "whet your Hatchet" and come to the aid of the colonies in the event of a clash with Britain. Two weeks later, on April 19, the shot heard round the world was fired at the rude bridge in Concord, Massachusetts. (The man who commanded the militia that day at the Concord Bridge was John Buttrick; his son, Horatio Gates Buttrick, would become the first superintendent of buildings and grounds at Hamilton College, for whom present-day Buttrick Hall is named.) Within a month, Kirkland received another message from patriot authorities, this time from the Albany Committee of Correspondence, asking him to "use his influence" with the Oneidas "to maintain peace and harmony with the white people."

Patriot leaders in Massachusetts were very misinformed if they thought Kirkland had any influence over the Mohawks who looked to Guy Johnson, not to Kirkland, for guidance. Johnson briefly detained Kirkland, ordering him to abandon his mission to the Oneidas. But it was Johnson who soon was forced out of the Mohawk Valley, fearing that armed patriots were about to attack Johnson Hall. Accompanied by Brant, Johnson first went to Canada, and later that fall both men traveled to London. There Brant met King George III. The British promised they would protect Iroquois land claims if the Six Nations fought for them against the American rebels.

Kirkland did have influence with the Oneidas, and he meant to use it for the patriot cause as he shifted roles from missionary to revolutionary agent. In July 1775, he traveled to Philadelphia to secure financial support from the Second Continental Congress. He had with him a recommendation from General Philip Schuyler, American military commander in the New York or "Northern Department" of operations, who wrote of Kirkland, "His influence with the Indians renders him capable, and I believe there is no doubt of his willingness to serve his Country in this crucial hour." Congress was duly impressed, if not overly generous. It appropriated $300 for Kirkland's use in his efforts to secure the neutrality of the Six Nations.

Kirkland served the revolutionary cause in a variety of capacities. When he found himself in Oneida villages, he gathered intelligence or delivered supplies from patriot authorities (including barrels of rum, a good indication that his pastoral ideals were now subordinate to political duties). In the fall of 1776, he came to serve as chaplain to the American garrison at Fort Stanwix, now renamed Fort Schuyler. From there on January 3, 1777, he wrote to General Schuyler to pass on information he gleaned from a passing band of Tuscaroras, that:

> *two Senecas with a Mohawk were sent down by Col. Butler [John Butler, who commanded a unit of Iroquois and American loyalists] to reconnoiter this Garrison, the Numbers of Cannon, Strength &c.-That one of the party a Seneca Chief called Manguadakeha had returned on meeting Joseph Brant. ... The [Tuscarora] Chiefs above mentioned say 'tis reported that an attack is designed upon this River early in the Spring chiefly by the foreign Indians aided & conducted by the Senecas.*

Kirkland's warning proved accurate in essentials if not timing. The attack on Fort Schuyler and the Mohawk Valley came not that spring but in late summer 1777. On August 3, a mixed force of Indians, loyalists and British regulars under the command of Lt. Colonel Barry St. Leger began a siege of the fort. After its capture, their orders were to continue on to the Hudson, to meet up with a larger army of British regulars and Hessians commanded by General John Burgoyne, and then march south to capture Albany. A relief force of local militia led by Nicholas Herkimer marched west from Tryon County to break the siege but was ambushed en route on August 6 in a gorge in present-day Oriskany by loyalists and Iroquois warriors. John Butler and Joseph Brant were among the ambushers, and it was Brant's sister Molly, still living in the Mohawk Valley, who alerted the British to the approach of the relief column. Herkimer's forces included a band of Oneidas, who fought alongside the Americans against their brother Iroquois.

The Battle of Oriskany was costly to both sides. Four hundred Americans were killed, wounded or taken captive, the casualties including General Herkimer, who died of wounds he sustained that day. While the patriot relief column failed in its effort to lift the siege of Fort Schuyler, it did provide a distraction that worked to the disadvantage of the British besiegers. While the battle raged near the Oriskany Creek, back at Fort Schuyler the American garrison made a quick and successful sortie into the enemy's camp, destroying supplies and carrying off plunder. St. Leger's Indian allies were dismayed by the large number of their warriors killed and wounded during the battle, and by the loss of their belongings in the American raid on their camp, and most deserted their British allies. Three weeks later, St. Leger gave up the siege and retreated to Canada. And in the fall, Burgoyne's army was defeated by the American army at the Battle of Saratoga, in what proved the turning point of the Revolutionary War.

Kirkland's whereabouts during this decisive campaign are unknown. In the spring of 1777, he led a delegation of Oneida chiefs on a tour of patriot territory in New England, New York and New Jersey, meeting with General Washington at the Continental Army's encampment in Morristown, New Jersey. During the summer of 1777, Kirkland may have been making one of his rare wartime visits to his family in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. But his activities as an American agent among the Oneidas certainly contributed to the patriot victories that summer and fall.

Two years later, in 1779, he served as chaplain and interpreter for an American force commanded by General John Sullivan on a punitive campaign against pro-British Iroquois villages in western New York. The border fighting in New York was a cruel conflict, with atrocities committed by both sides as neighbor fought neighbor and tribe fought tribe. Kirkland's frontier home and his church with its fine steeple were destroyed when raiders led by Joseph Brant attacked Kanonwalohale in 1780, in retribution for the support that the Oneidas gave the Americans. By the time the fighting ended, most of the 600 Oneidas who survived the war were destitute refugees living off of handouts from patriot authorities. "The devastation of their towns reduced them to absolute want & dependence," Kirkland noted in his journal.

Samuel Kirkland, Landed Gentleman

On November 25, 1783, the last British troops occupying New York City climbed aboard the ships that would take them home. The American War of Independence was over; the Revolution had triumphed. Samuel Kirkland turned 42 years old the next week — and perhaps felt at loose ends. He had a large family to support, with whom he had spent little time over the past decade. The personal sacrifices he had made in his long years as a missionary before the Revolution may have all been in vain for, as he confided in his journal, he felt that in his absence the Oneidas had "degenerated as much as our paper Courency in the time of the war." But Kirkland was not a man to sit by idly while there was the Lord's work to do. By the next year, he had resumed his mission to the Oneidas.

At the same time, he was being drawn into a more secular enterprise as an agent for the New York and Massachusetts state governments and for private companies — all interested in Iroquois lands. The Revolutionary War was not simply a defeat for the British, but also for their allies the Iroquois. No longer would the Six Nations be an independent force capable of dealing as equals with neighboring white powers. The state government of New York was eager to pay off its war debts, including the bounty it owed its soldiers, with lands taken from the Indian allies of Great Britain. The Iroquois tribes that had fought on the losing side of the conflict were, of course, in a poor position to defend claims to their traditional territories. But, as it turned out, the Oneidas were hardly better off, notwithstanding the sacrifices they had made on behalf of the winning side.

Before the Revolution, Kirkland vowed never to acquire any property at the expense of the Oneidas. He had willingly embraced a life of ascetic self-sacrifice. Now, however, he was growing older, with a wife and six children to support, two of whom would soon go off to college — John to Harvard and George to Dartmouth. And all around him money was being made in land speculation by white men who were new to the region and had never done anything for the local Indians. The Oneidas looked to Kirkland as their protector, the one man they could count on to help negotiate with the powerful newcomers seeking their land. There was, however, little he could do to ensure that the Oneidas retained all of the five million acres they had controlled before the Revolution. Further complicating matters, in dealing with other Iroquois tribes, he was accepting commissions from land companies eager to employ his expertise to help obtain land from the Senecas in western New York. For his assistance to the Phelps-Gorham Company in 1788, he received 2,000 acres of former Seneca land located several miles south of present-day Geneseo. The term "conflict of interest" had yet to be coined, and to hold Kirkland to contemporary standards would be ahistorical moralizing. Nevertheless, the fact remains that within a half-decade of the end of the Revolutionary War, all of the Iroquois nations were left with a small

fraction of the land they had controlled at its start, while Samuel Kirkland found himself a major landowner.

The Iroquois land negotiations went on for years and present a complicated tale involving the federal government, three states and a number of private land companies.[5] The key moment in terms of Kirkland's future came at a meeting held at Fort Stanwix in 1788, when the Oneidas agreed to cede most of their land to New York State for a cash payment and some provisions. The exact provisions of that agreement, and whether in retrospect it and subsequent agreements had any legal validity, remain a source of controversy down to the present.

According to the agreement, the Oneidas retained a 300,000-acre reservation under their own control in present-day Madison County and western Oneida County. In a separate agreement, the Oneidas generously made a grant of land to Kirkland to repay him for his years of pastoral service. The Kirkland Patent, as it was depicted on maps drawn at the time, consisted of two square miles of land located to the west of the 1768 Property Line, so recently considered the absolute boundary of white settlement. The patent roughly encompasses the area of Clinton that lies between Oriskany Creek along its eastern border and Skyline Drive along its western border.

When Kirkland built his log cabin in the Kirkland Patent, he had some near neighbors to the south of his property — a small Indian settlement known as Brothertown for the Brothertown Indians who had settled there at the invitation of the Oneidas in 1786. The Brothertown Indians formed from the remnants of several Christianized southern New England and Long Island tribes under the inspiration and leadership of Eleazar Wheelock's first student, Samson Occom. Occom settled and would live in Brothertown until his death in July 1792. Kirkland preached his funeral sermon and took as his text Matthew 24:44, "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." If death was man's common fate, displacement was to be the peculiar fate of tribal America. Brothertown would not long survive its founder's passing; most of its residents would move westward to Calumet County, Wisconsin, in the early 19th century. A similar fate awaited the Stockbridge Indians, formerly of western Massachusetts. They, too, had migrated to a tract of land given to them by the Oneidas. New Stockbridge, as the tract was known, lay a few miles southwest of Kirkland's tract. In the remaining years of his life, Kirkland would preach to and advise residents of both these towns, an effort made easier by the fact that many spoke English and had been converted to Christianity before their move to Oneida territory.

To the north, across the Oriskany Creek, Kirkland had other and, as it proved, more permanent neighbors. On March 3–4, 1787, a small village was founded along the banks of the Oriskany Creek by Revolutionary War veteran Captain Moses Foote and seven other men, all originally from Connecticut. They decided to name their community after George Clinton, first governor of New York State (and later vice president of the United States under Thomas Jefferson).

When Kirkland resumed his mission after the Revolutionary War, he also resumed his pattern of returning to the family home in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, at widely varying intervals. He was visiting Stockbridge in January 1788 when his wife Jerusha went into premature labor, which neither she nor her baby would survive. Now a widower, Kirkland wished to reunite his surviving children under his own roof on his new land in New York. But it took time and some persuasion to bring them to Clinton. His sons John and George came to visit in September 1791, and John wrote to assure his eldest sister Jerusha, who was attending a school in Hebron, Connecticut, that she had nothing to fear: "The woods don't appear so terrible upon acquaintance, as they did when viewed at a distance." Jerusha apparently was unconvinced, preferring to remain in Connecticut for the moment, but in October Kirkland's other children moved to Clinton. The following year, Kirkland built a small frame house to replace the log cabin he had occupied for the past three years; it was the first house in Clinton to be sheathed in clapboard. Two years later, having sold off some of the land he had been granted by the Oneidas, he used the proceeds to build a large house in the fashionable Federalist style, complete with a columned portico and a Palladian window, nearby to his original cottage. The 1794 Kirkland mansion still

stands in Clinton near the junction of Harding Road and College Hill, a property now known as the Harding Farm; the 1792 cottage was purchased by the College in 1875 and moved to the campus — at first to a site in the College cemetery, and in 1925 to its present location beside Buttrick Hall. Kirkland had more land cleared and planted 30 acres of wheat and corn. And in 1796, after eight years as a widower, he married Mary Donnally, his late wife's best friend, in a marriage service conducted by the Reverend Asahel Norton of the Clinton Congregational Church.

The Founding of the Hamilton-Oneida Academy

And yet, for all of the trappings of wealth and gentility he could now for the first time afford, Kirkland did not settle into the life of a gentleman farmer. His journals from the early 1790s are crammed with accounts of journeys, meetings, projects, reunions and diplomatic intrigues. When his children moved to Clinton in the fall of 1791, he wasn't there — instead he was off meeting with the commissioners of the SSPCK in Boston, followed by a trip to Philadelphia to meet with federal officials, and then a long circuitous route home through Central and Western New York to meet with Indians at a half-dozen locations on business, both secular and sacred. He kept up his pastoral duties, regularly preaching at five Oneida settlements as well as at Brothertown and the Clinton Congregational Church. He carried out an extensive correspondence with government officials, religious leaders and old friends (including Mohawk leader Joseph Brant, exiled in Canada). He accepted the honors that began to come his way, including election to the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston in 1791 and a testimonial presented by John Wheelock (who had succeeded his father Eleazar as president of Dartmouth College), when he attended his son George's graduation ceremony in Hanover in August 1792. Secretary of War Henry Knox called on Kirkland frequently to deliver messages to or round up delegations from amongst the Iroquois. He was a busy man.

But he was not so busy as to give up his dream of converting the Oneidas to Christianity and to the ways of civilization as practiced among his own people. In January 1789, he noted in his journal that he was considering a new scheme designed to provide "an education of the first class" to talented Oneida youth, in order to "fit them for politicians and schoolmasters [and] to introduce the manners and customs of white people among them."

In October 1791, he drew up his "Plan of Education for the Indians," a plan that sought to learn from and avoid the mistakes that he and others had made in that endeavor throughout the past 30 years. As he now saw things, neither Moor's Indian Charity School, so far removed from the homeland of the students it sought to educate, nor the primary schools that Kirkland himself had helped to establish in Oneida villages had really accomplished much. As an alternative, Kirkland envisioned a school that would be established on the borderline between white and Indian lands — which was to say, in a community like Clinton:

> *The reason why it is necessary to have the school contiguous to the English on the one part is that the Indians cannot learn the language and manners of the English, but by hearing their language spoken and observing their manners. This has been sufficiently proved by experience. After much pains, there are but four scholars out of thirty in the school among the Oneidas, who have acquired any considerable degree of knowledge in the English language. … The chief reason why it is necessary to have the school contiguous to the Indians, on the other part, is, that as the habits of savage life are at a very great remove from those of a civilized, to oblige the Indian youth suddenly to break off all the former and adopt the latter, will unavoidably tend to depress their spirits, and either sink them into a torpid indifference, or beget in them an utter dislike to the improvements and manners of a civilized life.*

The school was intended to be, in modern terms, the equivalent of a high school rather than a primary school for the most gifted Indians from among the Iroquois. Kirkland proposed initially enrolling two Senecas and

two Oneidas, plus one student each from the Onondaga, Cayuga and Tuscarora tribes. In addition to learning to speak, read and write in English, and do basic arithmetic, the Indian students would also be instructed in "the principles of human nature, and the history of civil society" to help them learn the difference between "a state of nature and a state of civilization." Morality and "the more plain and express doctrines of Christianity" also would be inculcated.

Kirkland hoped that his new academy would disprove the belief held by some whites that Indians "have such a viciousness and depravity of disposition as forbids their civilization." The Indian graduates would demonstrate that "the difference between one nation and another is not so much owing to nature as to education."

Kirkland set out to recruit backers for the plan, meeting in Boston with his old sponsors, the commissioners of the SSPCK, and in Philadelphia with Timothy Pickering, postmaster general and superintendent of Indian affairs in the Washington administration, and then with Henry Knox, the secretary of war.

The most enthusiastic response came from the white settlers living along and nearby the Oriskany Creek. They may not have cared much one way or another about the education of Iroquois children, but they welcomed the prospect of a school that their own children (both male and female) could attend as well. Seventy-eight local men pledged land, cash, labor or construction materials to support the project in 1792–93. Among them was Moses Foote, Clinton's founder, who pledged two pounds cash, 20 days labor and construction materials. Kirkland himself donated 300 acres of the land he had been given by the Oneidas, and in the deed to the land he expressed his earnest hope that the new school would provide "an eminent means of diffusing useful knowledge, enlarging the bounds of human happiness, aiding the reign of virtue, and the kingdom of the blessed Redeemer."

Resuming his quest for influential backers, Kirkland traveled to Philadelphia at the start of 1793 and on January 8 met with President Washington, who "expressed approbation of the proposed Seminary." He also met with Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, who "cheerfully" consented to be listed as a trustee of the academy. (He had already been tentatively listed as such on the petition drawn up for the creation of the school by the 15 other trustees the previous November.)

With the addition of Hamilton's name, the trustee list was complete; oddly, Kirkland's name was not on it. But he remained the prime inspiration and organizer of the project, and at the end of January, he met with the Board of Regents of New York to present his proposal for the school, now known as the Hamilton-Oneida Academy. The regents approved the charter in principle on January 29 and signed it on January 31, 1793. The regents also agreed to appropriate $126 toward the costs of paying a teacher, purchasing books and scientific instruments, and providing tuition aid for Indian students. In gratitude, 16 Oneida chiefs, including Skenandoa, signed an address to the regents on April 27 wishing them "the satisfaction to find, on trial, that the minds of Indians may become as enlightened as the minds of the White people, and that all the difference between us and them consist only in the colour of the skin."

Now came the hard part. The Hamilton-Oneida Academy welcomed its first class in January 1794. The schoolhouse was a small building at the base of present-day College Hill. Ebenezer Caulkins, who had been teaching at a primary school in Kanonwalohale, was schoolmaster. The first class included four Indian children and, perhaps, 25 white students. After only three months, the building caught fire and burned to the ground. It was quickly rebuilt (and there are some who believe that the new schoolhouse building was later mis-identified as the Kirkland Cottage). When classes resumed at the academy in late spring, most of the whites but only one Indian student remained. That September, Caulkins departed, and the school was closed.

The trustees were not discouraged, and in the summer of 1794, they set about to construct a new building to house it — a much grander building in a new location a half-mile away. On July 1, 1794, a group of riders on

horseback made their way up the Indian path that led to the top of the hill that overlooked the Oriskany Creek and the village of Clinton. At the head of the procession rode the Reverend Samuel Kirkland and beside him Baron Friedrich von Steuben, the Prussian immigrant who had served as drillmaster to the Continental Army at Valley Forge, and who had, in retirement, recently settled in the Remsen Hills on land granted him by the New York State legislature for his Revolutionary War service. Behind them rode two of Kirkland's daughters, and then a company of cavalry, the Clinton Light Horse, commanded by his son George Kirkland. At the top of the hill, they dismounted. With von Steuben presiding, and with Chief Skenandoa and other Oneida notables in attendance as well as townspeople from Clinton, the cornerstone was laid for the new school building, a wooden structure three stories high and with three chimneys, especially impressive when compared to the log huts that most of Clinton's residents still occupied.

The building was expensive and funds ran low, despite further contributions from Kirkland. Two years later, nothing stood but a three-story frame, only half-enclosed, with birds and squirrels colonizing its rafters while foxes burrowed their way into the foundation. Some village skeptics took to calling it "Kirkland's Folly."

Samuel Kirkland had other problems in those years. For some time, he had been in failing health. In October 1792, while riding on horseback, a tree branch struck him in the eye, resulting in a prolonged inflammation that interfered with his reading and writing, a problem that would recur periodically for several years. In 1795, he was thrown from his horse and badly injured. Other ailments, the effect of advancing age rather than accident, accumulated. He was also burdened with his son George's misadventures. While John Kirkland was going from success to success (tutor at Harvard 1792–94, pastor of the New South Church in Boston 1794–1810, and eventually president of Harvard University, 1810–28), George drifted and dallied, accumulating debts from gambling and land speculation that his father would eventually have to pay off to keep him out of debtor's prison. He secured a commission in the U.S. Army in 1798, but was cashiered the following year. "The sorest trial I have ever known," Kirkland lamented, "is the embarrassments of my Son's affairs." It was worse by far "than all the hardships, fatigues, & difficulties I have undergone for near 40 years in the wilderness." (George would barely outlive his father, dying in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, in 1810, after some years of shady dealings in the Caribbean.)

Finally, thanks to contributions from a "number of Gentlemen of property and respectability" in Clinton and vicinity, the bankruptcy and foreclosure of the Hamilton-Oneida Academy were avoided, and its building was made ready to receive students. On December 26, 1798, a class of about 20, including some female students, began its studies under schoolmaster John Niles, a preacher and recent graduate of Yale College. James Murdock, a Yale classmate, would join Niles on the faculty. The following year, the Reverend Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College, was touring western New York and stopped by to visit Kirkland and get a look at his new academy. He was impressed by what he found:

> *This Seminary is already of considerable importance; and contains fifty-two students, of both sexes, under the care of two instructors. The scheme of education, professedly pursued in it, includes the English, Latin, and Greek languages, and most of the liberal arts and sciences. An Academic building is erected for it, eighty-eight feet long, and forty-six feet wide, of three stories, on a noble, healthy eminence, commanding a rich and extensive prospect. It is, however, but partially finished.*

And so, despite trials and tribulations, Kirkland had succeeded at last — except in one regard. According to the surviving academy records (which are not complete), only two Indians, and both for brief interludes, joined the white students at the academy during the next decade. Thus, the Hamilton-Oneida Academy followed the precedent of Dartmouth College and neglected the ostensible purpose for which it had been founded. Kirkland blamed the absence of Indian students on a lack of financial support, saying that "many have applied and repeatedly," but there was no money to pay for their tuition.

James Murdock would leave after his first year — there wasn't enough money to continue paying his salary. John Niles departed soon after due to ill health. Niles' successor was Robert Porter, still another Yale graduate, who served as principal of the academy until 1806. Seth Norton succeeded Porter as principal in 1806–07 and, except for a year's leave to serve as a tutor at Yale, remained the head of the academy until 1812. The campus consisted of the single building until 1802; in that year, a boardinghouse was built, although most students either lived at home or boarded in the village. (The boardinghouse, today's Backus House, was originally built on a site several hundred feet downhill from its present location, roughly at the corner of College Hill and Campus Road; it was moved on log rollers to its present site in 1853.)

In 1805, with the academy over the worst of its financial problems (although still not solvent enough to complete the construction of the classrooms in its main building), the trustees decided to petition the regents to recharter the school as a full-fledged college. The white population of the region was growing dramatically. By 1810, Oneida and Madison counties counted 50,000 white settlers in more than 30 towns. Enumerating to the regents the advantages that the academy possessed, Thomas Hart, president of the academy's board of trustees, declared:

> *It is situated on an eminence, possessing of the advantages of a pure and healthful air, and extensive and rural prospect; in the midst of a moral, frugal, and industrious people, contiguous to the Great Western Turnpike, and in the vicinity of several large and flourishing villages, where the business and wealth of the country will center.*

But the regents were slow to act, and years went by without their approval of a new charter.

Samuel Kirkland would not live long enough to see the Hamilton-Oneida Academy become a college. As the Reverend Asahel Norton, the Congregational minister who had presided at Kirkland's second marriage, recorded in his journal, "On Sunday morning, February 28, 1808, I was informed that [Kirkland] was extremely ill. … I stayed as long as I could before morning service, and on my arrival at the Meeting house was met with the tidings that he had just expired." Kirkland was buried in the orchard that stood to the south of his mansion. Eight years later, another grave was added to the plot when Chief Skenandoa, reputed to be 110 years old, died. His last request was that he be buried beside his old friend Samuel Kirkland "that I might cling to the skirts of his garments and go up with him at the great resurrection." In 1856, the bodies of Samuel Kirkland and Chief Skenandoa, as well as Kirkland's daughter Eliza, who died in 1819, were disinterred and transferred to their present sites in the College cemetery. A new monument to Chief Skenandoa was erected in the cemetery in 1999 to replace the original, whose inscription had worn away in the intervening years.

The year before Kirkland died, there were more than 120 students in the Hamilton-Oneida Academy — but no Oneidas among their number. In 1847, Kirkland's grandson, daughter Jerusha's son Samuel Kirkland Lothrop, would publish the first biography of his grandfather, Life of Samuel Kirkland, Missionary to the Indians. He opened his account with these words:

> *To propagate the gospel, and introduce the arts and influences of Christian civilization among the aborigines of North America, has, from the discovery of the country, been an object dear to the heart of Christian philanthropy. The attempt can now be regarded as in a great measure only a splendid failure; but not the less worthy or honorable are the labors of those who have from time to time engaged in it.*

Though colored by filial piety, that seems a fair judgment. As does the more critical perspective offered by Walter Pilkington, librarian and historian of Hamilton College, in a volume published on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the College's founding in 1962:

In [Kirkland's] lifetime the Oneidas had fallen from their independent state and showed few positive results from their white father's forty-year mission. Only in the gradual growth of the Academy did there appear to be visible reward for Kirkland's efforts; but that had developed along lines far from its founder's original intent.

In the chapters that follow, we will trace those lines as they continued to develop in often unexpected ways throughout the next two centuries of Hamilton College history.

Chapter 1 Endnotes

1. This quotation from Kirkland's journals, and subsequent quotations from the journal throughout the chapter, can be found in Walter Pilkington, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland, 18th Century Missionary to the Iroquois, Government Agent, Father of Hamilton College* (Clinton, N.Y.: Hamilton College, 1980). Important documents from this period can also be found in *Documentary History of Hamilton College* (Clinton, N.Y.: Hamilton College, 1922). Spelling is left as it appears in the original documents.

2. The author is grateful to Donald B. Potter, emeritus professor of geology at Hamilton College, for introducing him to the intricacies of Mohawk Valley geology. Also helpful was a work by an earlier Hamilton geologist, Nelson C. Dale, *Geology and Mineral Resources of the Oriskany Quadrangle*, New York State Museum Bulletin, No. 345 (Albany, N.Y.: University of the State of New York,1953).

3. Much of the account of Kirkland's life that follows is drawn from Christine S. Patrick's1993 Ph.D. dissertation "The Life and Times of Samuel Kirkland,1741–1808: Missionary to the Oneida Indians, American Patriot, and Founder of Hamilton College," Dissertations Abstracts International 54, no. 2, as well as Walter Pilkington's sesquicentennial history, *Hamilton College: 1812–1962* (Clinton, N.Y.: Hamilton College,1962) and Pilkington's edited version of *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland*.

4. For a recent history of the Oneidas, see Anthony Wonderley, *Oneida Iroquois Folklore, Myth, and History* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

5. The history of these land deals is laid out in detail in Alan Taylor's magisterial book *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 2006).