INTRODUCTION

SAMUEL KIRKLAND 1765-1793

History can be an exciting and rewarding field; for the past four months I have been reading the letters of Samuel Kirkland and I have come to know a man. I have seen him on his first mission, a trip into the land of the hostile Senecas. I have seen him as he married and had children. I have seen him suffer, be it because of famine or cold or through the loss of a loved one. I have seen the grief of a man as the good of his life work is destroyed by the false words of a single evil presence. I have seen his hope as I watched him strive for a better future for the Indian.

The 28 years of Samuel Kirkland's correspondence covered in this work are special, as these are the prime years of the devoted missionary's life. In these letters, we witness the establishment of his mission, his laying of the groundwork for the Hamilton-Oneida Academy and Kirkland's role in the early politics of the United States. He is healthy and inspired during these years, and it is not until later that the sour and sickly old man begins to show through.

Samuel Kirkland was born on December 1, 1741 in Norwich, Connecticut. His father, Daniel, was the Congregational pastor of the Norwich (or Newent) parish for almost 30 years. Hannah Perkins Kirkland, Samuel's mother, also
was of Yankee stock, hailing originally from Windsor, Connecticut. ¹

As a youth, Samuel Kirkland enrolled in the More's Indian Charity School, and thus began his association with Eleazer Wheelock. Kirkland showed an early interest in Indian missionary work and in 1762 began his theological training at Princeton. Kirkland's upbringing and education were to have a profound impression on his life, and indeed on the entire New York region. His way of thinking remained distinctly New England-aligned, and his religion was a version of Puritanism.

Kirkland's first trip into the wilderness came in 1765, not long before he was due to graduate from Nassau Hall. Presumably Dr. Wheelock wanted to see results from this promising change of his, and hence the young man was sent to Seneca Castle to win converts before he actually finished school. It was a hard trip but Kirkland apparently made a few friends among the restless Senecas before returning to New England in May, 1766.²

Following his ordination at Lebanon, Connecticut, Kirkland returned to the wilderness, this time to Oneida, where he was to remain a missionary for over forty years. At first, he was supported by Wheelock, but by 1769, this relationship came to a bitter end. Wheelock tended to forget about Kirkland's need for funds and Kirkland feuded with Dr. Wheelock's son, Ralph. Dr. Wheelock and Kirkland
disagreed off and on over the next five or six years, and this occupied much of Kirkland's time during this period.  

As a result of Wheelock's failure to support him, Kirkland came under the jurisdiction of the London Board of Correspondents in Boston (the LBCB), the American hand that worked the purse strings of the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (the SSPCK) in 1770. Harvard College also came to support Kirkland. This proved to be a much more satisfactory arrangement than working for Wheelock had been. Kirkland was enabled to build a house for himself and his bride; Jerusha Bingham, whom he married in September, 1769. He also had constructed at Oneida a sawmill, a gristmill and a new meeting house that was large enough to accommodate the hundreds of Oneidas, Tuscaroras and other Indians who began to flock to his Sunday sermons.  

The period 1770-74 marked perhaps the calmest period in Kirkland's missionary career. The Indians appeared to accept his teachings, and his financial support was adequate. This period marked the height of Kirkland's correspondence with John Thornton, a prominent English Theologian. Thornton was supportive of Kirkland in his quarrels with Wheelock and occasionally gave him money. Samuel and Jerusha consequently named one of their twin sons John Thornton Kirkland in honor of him. (The other boy was also named after a prominent evangelist, George Whitefield, the
originator of the "New Lights" movement.)

Unfortunately for all concerned, this situation changed drastically with the increasing friction between England and her American colonies. The Iroquois were caught in the middle of the ensuing tug of war, and Samuel Kirkland unwillingly became a determining force in the conflict's progress. England wanted to use the Six Nations against her rebellious colonies, while Kirkland and other Americans preferred that the Indians remained peaceful. By the early 1770's British authorities began to resent Kirkland's influence on the Indians resulting from his increasing prominence among the Six Nations. Sir William Johnson reflected this growing nervousness in his papers, although his major complaint was with the missionary's brand of religion. However, Johnson's son and successor; Col. Guy Johnson, was much less polite and much more concerned with what he called Kirkland's "political" influence on the Indians. This change, Kirkland felt, stemmed from the fact that he had read the resolves of Continental Congress to the Indians and advocated peace.

The British had anything but peace in mind for the Iroquois, and they employed every means possible to incite them into action against the colonial frontier. The fledgling American government resisted; they even employed Kirkland as a peace ambassador to the Six Nations, but in the end the experience of the British Indian agents
and the restlessness of the Indians made them become involved in the fighting. The Mohawks were joined on the "King's side" by the Senecas, Cayugas and finally, the Onondagas, while the Oneidas and Tuscaroras remained true to the patriot cause and to Kirkland.

Kirkland too, came to be more and more involved with the rebel cause. His initial position as a peace ambassador was expanded to that of an intelligence officer. He and James Dean, one of Wheelock's missionaries residing at Oneida, passed on facts and rumors collected by the Oneidas and other friendly Indians. Kirkland became an Indian advisor for the Continental Congress and was appointed the chaplain at Ft. Stanwix. He also accompanied the Sullivan expedition as that army's chaplain.

The Six Nations became divided into two camps. One was composed of those who aligned themselves with the British working out of Ft. Niagara. Col. Butler and Joseph Brant (a classmate of Kirkland's at the More's Indian Charity School) were the leaders of this group. The other party was composed of the Indians who remained friendly to the United States. Thus split, the Confederacy was never to regain its former strength and unanimity.

At the close of hostilities, both the unity of the Six Nations and Kirkland's mission were in a shambles. The Treaty of Stanwix (1784) was the official peace pact between the United States and the Iroquois, but it soon
became apparent that, because of the continuing influence of the British at Niagara, that this peace was a precarious one at best. Amid this division, Kirkland had to struggle to reestablish any sort of productive ministry among his disgruntled Indians.

Many of Kirkland's post-war letters deal with his appeals for funds to rebuild the mission. 11

Towards the end of the 1780's, the most pressing problem for the Six Nations, besides their state of disunity, became that of selling land. Kirkland also got embroiled in this. Due to the Revolution, the presence of the fertile soils of Western New York became common knowledge to White Americans. The Iroquois began to have many colonists clamoring for a chance to settle on their land. The State of New York showed itself agreeable to these wishes and soon tracts of Indian land began to come into the possession of whites. Kirkland was a good friend of Oliver Phelps of the Gorham - Phelps Purchase, and he was among those who helped to establish the legality of that purchase. 12 Kirkland himself reneged on an earlier promise made to the Iroquois and acquired a two-mile square tract within the Oneida Reservation. 13

In November, 1790, tension on the frontier caused the United States to attempt an expedition against the Miamis (in Ohio). 14 This campaign failed. Cornplanter picked this opportunity to complain to Congress about his treatment by the negotiators of the Gorham - Phelps Purchase,
and soon Indian affairs remained as unstable as they had been before the Revolution.

To help remedy this situation, Kirkland's help was again solicited. He was asked to travel to the Genesee County to invite a number of important Six Nations' Chiefs to Philadelphia for a good will visit and a chance to talk to Congress and the President. At first the Chiefs hesitated, but around 40 finally made the trek. The trip was successful, because the chiefs were impressed by the new government, and they signed the treaty of Philadelphia. Since three of the Indians died on the trip however, one gets the feeling that they overstayed their visit. Three periods of mourning delayed the chiefs in the capital. 15

The treaty signed at Philadelphia provided for practical training for the Indians in an effort to help them cope with the white man's world, and, by the end of 1793, this had become Samuel Kirkland's most pressing concern. In 1792 he drew up the Plan of Indian Education, which provided for a Vocational School for Indians and Whites. This, in addition to the blacksmiths, carpenters and farmers provided by Congress, he hoped were to be the Six Nations' long-term key to success. Our view of Kirkland concludes as he is trying to set up the Hamilton-Oneida Academy and bring honest workmen to Oneida to teach his Indians the Yankee way. 16

Samuel Kirkland led an active life and some of his activities took him far from the traditional realms of a
missionary. By reading his correspondence, one can get a glimpse of this man's life and also take a peek at what it was like to live in colonial and revolutionary New York among the proud Iroquois. It is hoped that the following work will be of use to the student of the Six Nations and of the early United States, as well as to the biographer of the founder of Hamilton College.
FOOTNOTES

1. Lathrop, S.K. "The Life of Samuel Kirkland" in
   The Library of American Biography ed. Jared Sparks
   vol. XV Little and Brown, Boston: 1848 p. 141-2

2. Correspondence of Samuel Kirkland; 2b

3. ibid. 22b, 30b, 31b, 32a, etc.

4. ibid. 14a

5. ibid. 15a, 19a, 23c, 26c, 31b, etc.

6. ibid. 53b

7. ibid. 54b

8. ibid. 62a, 63a, 63b, 67a, etc.

9. ibid. 61b, 61c, 79a

10. ibid. 76a, 76b, 78a, 78b

11. ibid. 84a, 84b, 84c, 85b, etc.

12. ibid. 105a, 130c, 132a, 132d

13. ibid. 104b, 109a, 111b

14. Lennox, Herbert John, Samuel Kirkland's Mission to
    the Iroquois, an unpublished dissertation delivered
    at the University of Chicago Divinity School in
    August, 1932. p. 163

15. CSK op. cit. 144-148 inclusive

16. ibid. 143a, 143b, 149e, 150a, etc.