



Monday, November 29, 2021

Seneca Falls Police Chief, Seneca County Sheriff, and Seneca County District Attorney respond to recent concerns about past police interactions with the Cayuga Indian Nation.

Recently there has been a lot of misinformation circulating in the public, social media, and particular news media concerning the February 2020 interactions between the police and the Cayuga Indian Nation. Some of this involves the case of the People of N.Y.S. versus Charles Bowman. It would be unethical and improper for us to comment on Mr. Bowman's case. His case is pending prosecution after a Grand Jury indictment under due process of law. We will, however, attempt to clear up some of the misconceptions touted by some as facts.

For clarity's sake, we will refer to the opposing factions of the Cayuga Indian Nation as the Clint Halftown faction and the anti-Halftown faction. No disrespect is intended to either faction. Names adopted by some of the splinter factions have changed over the years, and we want to be precise.

The two factions have been at odds for years. Properties in Seneca and Cayuga Counties have changed hands with violence, property destruction, and other disputes. Through it, all the Seneca County law enforcement agencies have endeavored to protect our citizens, keep the peace and not take sides. Arrests have been made when lawful and appropriate. We respect the Cayuga Indian Nation's right to settle its internal disputes within the confines of applicable State and Federal laws. This has long been the request of the Cayuga Indian Nation and is the advice we consistently receive from our Federal and State partners.

For several years an uneasy stalemate continued between both factions. Chief Stuart Peenstra was the key leader in organizing local, state, and federal agencies as an ongoing task force addressing public safety issues and events involving the Cayuga Indian Nation. Regular meetings in person and electronically were held. Discussions were also held on occasion with representatives from both factions. Public safety and legal issues were the focus of this group.

Members of the group facilitated and contacted by Chief Peenstra included: Seneca Falls Police Department, Seneca, and Cayuga County Sheriffs, District Attorneys, County Attorneys, County Managers, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Indian Affairs, New York State Police, Federal Bureau of Investigation and the New York State Attorney General's Office.

When the Halftown faction formed their own Nation Police Department, the group was contacted, and several meetings were held. The consensus was that although we did not support the forming of this police department, there was nothing that could be done to stop it. This included checking with the N.Y.S. Department of Criminal Justice Services. The Key was that the B.I.A., the U.S. D.O.J., and the U.S. Department of the Interior confirmed that the Nation had the right to form the Police Department and enforce tribal laws on tribal land with tribal members.

Matters escalated when the federal government recognized Clint Halftown as the leader of the Cayuga Indian Nation. Before, both factions claimed to be the legitimate government of the Cayugas, and law enforcement remained neutral on that issue. Once Halftown received Federal and B.I.A. recognition, the stalemate was broken.

In February 2020, Chief Peenstra received information from a confidential informant concerning the raid and demolition of Cayuga Indian Nation property in Seneca Falls. Some have alleged that the police did nothing. That is not true. Members of the aforementioned group were contacted, and our local, state, and federal partners were requested to assist. A multi-agency command post was established with the Seneca Falls Police Department, Seneca County Sheriff's Office, and the New York State Police. Approximately 50 police officers staged at the command post located at the Seneca Falls Police Department. A perimeter was established, and response teams were formed to handle any complaints received or rescue persons in distress. Emergency medical units were also staged on the perimeter, and fire services were coordinated. Information continued to be received by confidential informants. At no time did law enforcement condone, support, or facilitate the raid.

No decisions that day were made in a vacuum. The input was provided by all involved, including attorneys and members of Federal and State agencies already mentioned. The consensus was that law enforcement did not have the right to interfere with the demolition of Cayuga Indian Nation-owned property by the agents of the federally recognized leader. We did not condone the Nation's swearing-in mercenaries to use as Nation police, but again we were advised that it was not violating any law.

We established rules of engagement that included responding to any complaints involving crimes against persons and safeguarding the public. We established that we would not take sides or interfere with Cayuga Indian Nation-owned property in dispute.

No complaints were received during the demolition event, and there were no reports of anyone being harmed.

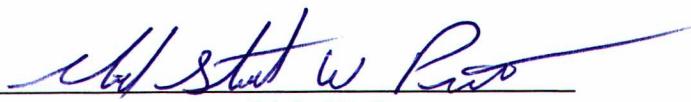
The anti-Halftown faction contacted Chief Peenstra and requested assistance holding a peaceful ceremony at the scene during the days following the event. The following Saturday, law enforcement and first responder teams were mobilized again to protect the public as before. Representatives from the anti-Halftown faction promised that they would not attempt to re-take the property and that there would be no violence. The unified law enforcement command secured a portion of the roadway in the vicinity of the scene to allow the faction to conduct their ceremony in the interest of peace, fairness, and respect.

At the end of the ceremony, certain members of the anti-Halftown faction, including Mr. Bowman, charged the Cayuga Nation Police line on Cayuga Nation property. These same individuals engaged in physical confrontations with Cayuga Nation Police members and damaged Cayuga Nation property. A short-lived riot broke out. Law enforcement members put themselves in harm's way to get between combatants and stop the fighting. Mr. Bowman was taken and dropped off by Nation police to a perimeter ambulance where he "signed off," which means he refused any treatment or transport to the hospital by Emergency Medical Services. This incident sparked a lengthy investigation led by the Seneca Falls Police Department with the assistance of our State and county law enforcement partners. Both the Halftown and the anti-Halftown factions were investigated as law enforcement sifted through the piles of evidence that were obtained. Once the investigation was concluded, the case was turned over to the Seneca County District Attorney's Office, where it was presented to the Grand Jury.

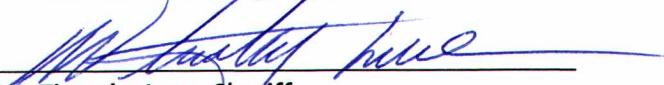
We hope this has cleared up at least some of the misconceptions concerning the events in February 2020 and the circumstances leading up to them. We recognize that the issues involving the Cayuga Indian Nation invoke strong emotional responses in some, and it doesn't make matters any better that there are no easy answers. Some of these issues have been debated in courts of law for decades with no clear answers. The Nation has long been established that it has a sovereign right to govern itself within the parameters of appropriate State and Federal laws. Unwanted interference by opinionated non-Nation persons or groups, although well-meaning, can be misinterpreted and may escalate or prolong disputes.

We pledge to continue to safeguard our citizens and respect the rights of the Cayuga Indian Nation as afforded by law. We urge the pursuit of mutual understanding among the Nation factions and that they will find and build upon their common ground, becoming peacefully whole.

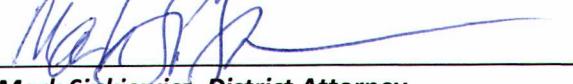
Respectfully,



Stuart W. Peenstra, Chief of Police
Seneca Falls Police Department



W. Timothy Luce, Sheriff
Seneca County Sheriff's Office



Mark Sinkiewicz, District Attorney
Seneca County District Attorney's Office