

CANADIAN GENTLEMEN VS IROQUOIS INDIANS

In 1876 a tour of England, Scotland and Ireland by a party of 13 Canadians from Montreal Lacrosse Club and 13 native Americans from the Caughnawaga reservation, just south of Montreal generated a lot of interest among men looking to take up the new sport. The tour included 10 cities – Belfast, Dublin, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Sheffield, London (7 locations), Brighton, Bristol and Manchester – with 27 games over 52 days during May/June.

Dr Thomas Archer had introduced lacrosse to the members of the Thames Hare & Hounds Running Club, which held its training and races across Wimbledon Common in London. Archer was previously a member of Montreal LC, and helped to coordinate some of the matches (Principally those taking place in London) of the U.K. tour, which was led by Dr W.G. Beers. Dr Beers was also a member of Montreal LC, and was most notable for having written the first rules of field lacrosse in his 'Brochure' circa 1860, and then 'Lacrosse – The National Game of Canada', published in 1867. He also was instrumental in the formation of the Canadian Lacrosse Assn around that time. When the National Lacrosse Association of Canada was formed in 1867, it was the Dominion of Canada's first governing body of sport as 1867 was the year Canada became a dominion.

The touring party departed New Brunswick, Canada aboard 'The Moravian' on 29 April 1876 and arrived in Belfast on 8 May. The tour was to finish with 2 games at the Longsight Cricket Ground in Manchester on 27/28 June, and the following day the touring party would depart for Quebec, again on the 'The Moravian'. Interestingly, the day before the first game at Manchester, the touring party played a game of lacrosse at Windsor Castle (London) and as stated in the brochure below 'Her most gracious Majesty, The Queen, having commended the Canadian lacrosse teams to play before the Royal Family at Windsor', thus their appearances at Manchester were postponed to the following 2 days. We can only assume that the tourists were transported from London to Manchester the following day by train. It is also interesting that the tourists played virtually every day except Sunday, the day of rest!



The Iroquois team

Whilst the teams were playing in London, the Iroquois captain Tier Karonaire sent a message to the Queen, which included the text of a speech. As a result, the Queen issued an invitation for him to deliver the address to her in person, and the date set for the teams' private visit. The Iroquois & Canadian players arrived at Windsor by train about 4pm, and at 5.00pm proceeded to the lawn in front of the East Terrace, where the Queen, Princess Beatrice (the Queen's youngest daughter aged 19) and

members of the Royal Household watched the two teams play a short demonstration game. After the match, Tier Karonaire delivered his speech to the Queen (See extract below from the Glasgow Herald). In return, the Queen presented each player with a signed photograph of herself, and recorded the visit in her journal entry for that day, writing: "I watched a game of 'La Crosse' played by a team of 14 Canadians & 13 Iroquois Indians. They were first presented to me by Mr J. Lowther (Under Secretary for the Colonies), and their Captain Dr Beers said some words, to which I replied. Then the Indians, who had most curious names came up, headed by their Chief, a very tall man, & read a long address in the Iroquois language, with much emphasis having first placed his tomahawk on the ground before me, in sign of submission. They were strangely painted & some were very dark. They wore coloured feathers on their heads & sorts of 'tricots' like acrobats. I gave to both Canadians & Indians, each, one of my signed photographs. The latter begged to offer a basket of their manufacture to 'our good Mother' as they called me."

"To our great and good mother Queen Victoria across the big water, we, the Iroquois Indians of Caughnawaga, near the city of Montreal, at the head of the mighty rapids of Lachine, send you our true love and loyalty. We hope to see you some day in this great land which once belonged only to the Indians; but we hope you will come and look upon us playing our own great game of La Crosse in England against the pale-faced young men of Canada, who now play our game like us, and sometimes beat us in fair play. But the English were always a brave people, and the Indians love and trust them. When the English soldier dies, he dies firm, like an Indian. He makes no cry. Good Queen, our forefathers were once one people, and became the six nations. They were first in war, first in eloquence, first in loyal love to the English. Our warriors carried victory in the war-path from Quebec to the Carolinas, and from the prairies of the West to the forests of Malina. They feared no foe—they loved the war-path as a bird loves the air. The war-whoop was as a sweet sound. They fought every enemy and exterminated many tribes, and made the foes of their people scatter like leaves in the wood before the wind. At the council-fire, at the chase, on the war-path, in the playing-field, the Iroquois were the first. Great Queen, our young men used to play La Crosse on the prairies and at the forts before your brave soldiers. When other tribes were against the English the Iroquois always were true. When death with torture came, the Iroquois still kept true. When Pontiac, the great head chief, planned to kill your brave soldiers and asked the Iroquois to join, our forefathers kicked the war-belt of wampum and would not go, because they and the English were friends. On the 4th of June, 1763, the birthday of our great father King George, at Fort Michillimachinac, your brave soldiers of the 55th and 80th Regiments were killed by Indians. A great game of La Crosse was played to put them off their guard, and when the ball was thrown into the fort the Indians ran in as if for the ball and killed your soldiers. Our forefathers, the Iroquois, did not join in this. It is the same game which the pale-faces of Canada have adopted from us, and which we want your people to see; and we would like all your children to see it, because we played it before the Prince of Wales and Prince Arthur. Will you, great and good Queen, hear the petition of your Indian children? God save the Queen!"

The tourists were booked to return to Canada from Liverpool on 29 June, so there was still time to fit in another couple of dates. By good fortune, this gave the opportunity to play two matches in Manchester (enroute to Liverpool), which were only scheduled at late notice, but which were now able to be promoted as the sport that had received 'Royal Patronage'.

The two dates in Manchester would prove to be important for the future of the game in England, as the city has subsequently become the main centre for men's lacrosse within the UK. Good weather on the Tuesday helped to generate a crowd of 4,000 for the 3pm start (despite it being a working day). As usual the teams played a 'best of five goals' format, which saw the Canadians end up 3–2 winners, but as the match finished well before the planned 6pm end time, they played four more games – with the Iroquois winning three of them to be able to also claim a victory from the day's play.

As the local 'Manchester Courier' reported on the match: "As a beneficial exercise it has no superior, combining as it does the benefit of several. It brings into operation at one time more muscle than any other game, requires a steady concentration of the mind while it is being played, sharpens the faculties of the dullest, and equalises its exercise over the entire system"