

Ganondagan Historic Site
Victor, New York
7/15/98

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

**First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Ganondagan State Historic Site
Victor, New York
July 15, 1998**

Thank you very much. I want to thank Peter and Jeanette for helping to arrange this visit and for serving as my host and hostess while I have been here. I want to thank the clan mothers for taking their time to talk and visit with me and share some information about their way of life and what they do to preserve that way of life. I would like to thank the spirit dancers. I enjoyed seeing you; it was too short, but on a hot day like this, as hard as you were dancing, it was probably long enough, and I am glad that you could be part of this, and the musicians as well. Thank you very much for making me feel so welcome at this important historic site.

I am delighted that, as we heard from the representative from the Park's Department here in the state, that this site -- started in 1987 -- is here to represent the many contributions and experiences of the native people of New York, particularly the Iroquois Nation. And to understand how significant that is, just think for a minute about what it means that I am here on a tour to Save America's Treasures that is part of the White House Millennium Council program.

A millennium ago, we only had the people represented here, in this country. The traditions, the way of life, the experiences of all who were part of the Iroquois Nation Federation show what it meant to be alive in the millennium, the first millennium here in this part of the world. And I think that's important for all of us who are Americans to stop for a minute and think about the way of life that is represented by the people whose dances and music we have just seen and heard. Because when we think about and as we work toward, the saving of America's treasures as part the White House Millennium Council's program, I think that one of our primary missions is to indicate to all American's how diverse and rich and deep our history is.

So, on this tour, we started at the Smithsonian and saw the Star-spangled Banner, we went on the see the Fort McHenry, over which that banner flew in the war of 1812 against the British. We have been in many places in the last three days. We have honored the work of different Americans. An African-American like Harriet Tubman, who fled slavery and led others to freedom; a young Irish-American woman named Kate Mullany who started the first women's labor union in Troy, New York; a beautiful theater, the Colonial Theater, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, which had on its stage at one time all kinds of performers representing the full range of the arts in our country. We visited the home of a famous American novelist, the first American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize, Edith Wharton. We have been in many different parts of this region of our country, but it is especially fitting that we would come here on our tour, because how can we think about going into the next millennium without being respectful and honoring our past; which means respecting and honoring the contributions of all of you who represent the Iroquois Nation.

So it is a great pleasure for me to be here to learn more about the way of life that has lasted for so many generations. In speaking with the clan mothers, I learned a little bit about what the clan mothers do, and I was struck by how in keeping it is with the idea of the mother of the nation. And her admonitions about how people should think about the decisions they make, and her three pieces of advice that have stood the test of time are ones that we would all do well to take to heart. Is this decision one that will lead to peace, is it one that will honor Mother Nature, is it one that is good for seven generations?

As we live in this very fast-paced world of ours, and as we move very quickly from day-to-day and toward the new century and the new millennium, it is sometimes easy to lose track of what is really important. And one of the goals of our Millennium Project is to honor the past and imagine the future. We are here to do both, because I have seen and heard about both today. Yes, we are honoring the past and the traditions of the past, represented in the long house, represented in the generational traditions that the clan mothers bring forward, and in the dances we have seen. But we are also imagining the future, and we can see that in the faces of the young men and women. That is a challenge for every American, regardless of whatever background we might come from. How do we honor the past and bring forward the lessons and the values that are important into the present so we can use them to imagine a future that keeps faith with the past but gives our children the opportunities to fulfill the dreams we have for them and they have for themselves.

So, I am very honored to be here. I am honored to learn more about this way of life, and I commend you for all you are doing to keep alive the languages, the traditions that are such an important part of the experience and history of America. And I know that those of you who are directly involved in that effort have worked very hard to make it possible for these young men and women to understand how to honor their own past; and I have great confidence, based on what I have seen and heard today, that you are imagining and building a future that keeps faith with the past but moves forward into the new century and millennium. Thank you for honoring us by permitting us to visit with you here today.

Thank you all very much.