

# Oswego Forts - A Lecture by Dr. Griffis

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## DR. GRIFFIS'S LECTURE.

### Sir William Johnson's Relations to Oswego.

The Fortnightly Club-House Was Crowded Last Evening—An Historical Paper That Had Particular Interest to Oswegonians—Deputy State Engineer Judson Presided.

Dr. William Elliot Griffis, of Ithaca, read a remarkably interesting paper entitled "The Relation of Oswego to the Times and Events of Sir William Johnson" before the Oswego Historical society at the Fortnightly club last night. The attendance was large and the lecture was very enjoyable and instructive.

Mr. William Pierson Judson, of the Historical society, presided and introduced Dr. Griffis.

The lecturer prefaced the history of Sir William with a history of Oswego from the earliest times.

In order to illustrate the importance of Oswego in those early days he mentioned the fact that King Louis XV., of France, caused a silver medal to be struck off in commemoration of the capture of Wesel in Germany, Oswego, Port Mahon in India and St. David's in the Mediterranean by the French troops. Oswego was considered to have been the most important place of the four.

On all the powder horns used by the colonists and others at that time maps were carved and engraved and on all these maps Oswego was designated.

There were three forts at Oswego in 1756, two on the West side called Fort Chouagen and Fort George and one on the East side, Fort Ontario. Doctor Griffis gave a graphic description of the capture of Oswego by the French under General Montcalm, August 11th, 1756. After sketching at some length the early history of the settlement here, Doctor Griffis referred more directly to Sir William Johnson. He was an Irishman and was born in Smithtown, County Meath, Ireland, in 1715. Eight years later, in 1723, Governor Burrett's pioneers raised the British flag in Oswego.

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The Daily Palladium,  
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house on the Mohawk river near Schenectady, which still stands. In 1768 his wife died and he soon afterward formed a domestic alliance with Molly Brant, a sister of Red Jacket, the famous Indian chief. Johnson early recognized the benefits of an alliance with the Indians and by the exercise of his peculiar talents he soon ingratiated himself with the Iroquois confederacy, composed of the Six Nations, and in a short time was elected a Chieftain. Johnson skillfully gained control over the "children of the forest" and maintained that influence to the end.

The crowning achievement of Johnson's wonderful career was the establishment of final peace with Pontiac, Chief of the Algonquins, who controlled all the Indians between Buffalo and Detroit. Pontiac made a final effort to unite the Indians of the continent against the English, but was thwarted in his endeavors by Johnson. Several meetings were held for the purpose of arranging the terms of surrender, but the grand final meeting took place at Oswego. On July 23d, 1766, Pontiac, surrounded by his chiefs, and Johnson, together with his Generals and Indian allies, met here and the great Indian chieftain presented to Johnson a white wampum belt, which signified eternal

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peace. Johnson died prior to the Revolutionary War after having controlled the Indians for nearly fifty years, and having kept them in friendship with the British. The peace that he established remained unbroken until the Revolutionary War.

Oswego, Doctor Griffis says, was the greatest fur trading point in the colonies at that time and noted for the fertility of its soil, melons, cabbage and cucumbers of extraordinary size being grown here.

Doctor Griffis was heartily congratulated by those present for his admirable lecture, not only for its historical, but its literary value.

The Historical Society will probably have the lecture published in book form.

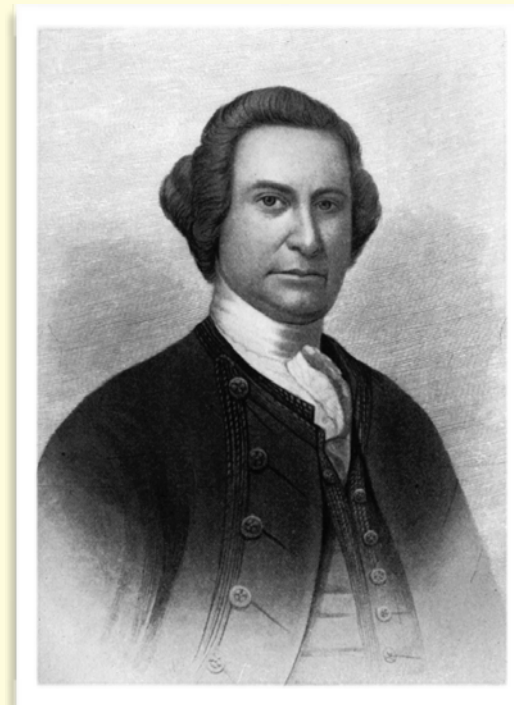
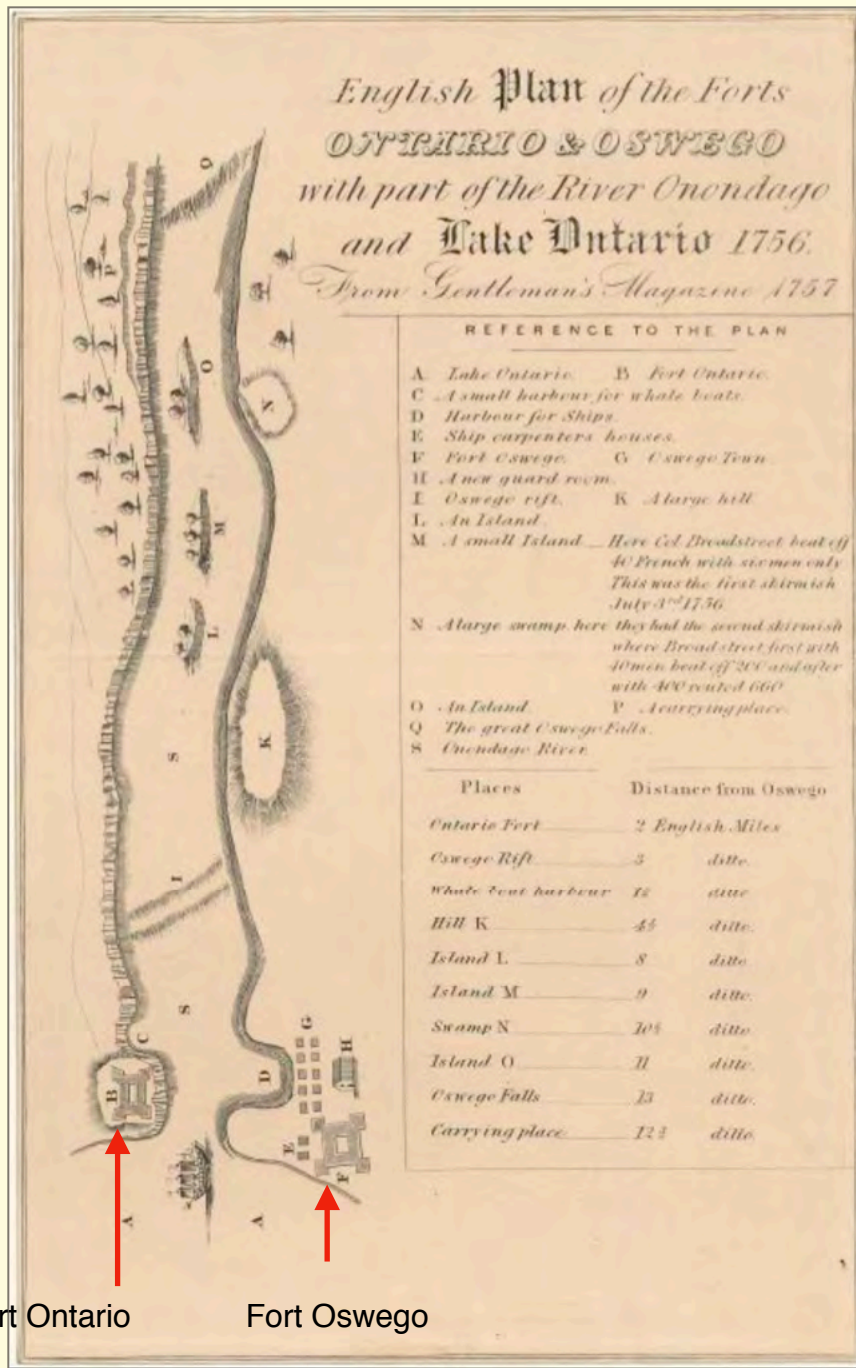
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Sir William Johnson, from plate in *The Old New York Frontier* by Francis Whiting Halsey, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901. The caption reads from a portrait in the State Library at Albany that was copied from an original owned by Sir John Johnson. This image is in the public domain as the copyright term is the author's life plus 70 years or less.

English Plan of the Forts Ontario & Oswego with part of the River Onondago and Lake Ontario 1756 From Gentleman's Magazine 1757.

## Questions for Further Research and Discussion:

1. The lecturer in the article (written in 1899) is referencing the mid 1700's in Oswego and quotes the phrase "children of the forests" when describing the Native Americans. Research the history of discrimination and marginalization of Native Americans by the French, British and colonists. How does Manifest Destiny of the 1800's play a part in the treatment of Native Americans?
2. What was the relationship between Native Americans and the French, British, and colonists during the 1700's? How was it different from or similar to the treatment of Native Americans in the late 1800's?
3. What were the benefits of forming an alliance with the Native Americans during the 1700's? Who benefitted?
4. This article was written from a view point of a non-Native American. To get the Native American side of the story, research Native American perspective of events during the 1700's. How are the Native American perspectives similar to or different from the perspectives of the French, British, and colonists?
5. Why did the king of France include Oswego on a map?
6. Who was Pontiac? What was the Seven Years War about? Why sign a treaty at Oswego?
7. Why/how did the Revolutionary War interrupt peace between the Native Americans and the British?
8. Research the types of crops that were successful in the Oswego area in the mid 1700's. What types of crops are grown in Oswego County today? Are they different or the same? In your opinion, explain why they are similar or different.