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Laws of the Oneida

Perhaps now we will tell the story of the kind of laws the leaders used to have. It happened that this man shot a man. It happened towards morning and then towards evening around three o'clock he died. The one who shot him was married, but the one who was shot was not married but staying with them. He prepared himself as his wife was still lying there in bed. Then he reloaded his gun. She got a little scared because no one knows what he is going to do next, since he had no family to stop him. Then he left and went maybe six miles to his parents' house and told them he had committed a crime. Then he went off quite a ways into the woods where there was a shack used for making sugar. He sat there lying in wait as he hid. He had his gun with him and he prepared himself to shoot anyone.

At that time these leaders were the lawmakers and they got a few dozen men to come to go after him. So this Jacob Hill volunteered to go to the shack. He knocked on the door. The one who was there had his gun and used it to open the door for him. So he went in. They talked and he talked to him about what was best. He told him to give him his gun. He said, "Here, take this gun as you all will do to me however it goes."

Then they brought him to where the leaders had their meetings. They tried him and the way they ruled they would hang him in one month. Then they took him to town and locked him up. The one who was in charge of the jail said, "You can't lock him up here. You don't have any laws as Oneidas, but you can leave him here for one month but you'll pay for the cost of caring for him for one month and if you don't come back for him in one month's time, then I will let him go."

They came back for him when the month was up. It was all arranged where they would execute him in a place where all could see. There was never such a crowd in Oneida and they just came from all over to watch.

The leaders, as they are called, changed then. Now they stand back up and the ones who stand are the sachem/tribal chairman and the councilmen. I guess I'd say there is one man who leads and six of them are assistants. These people are selected and they come to do the business for those who live here. And now the white people are coming in so it wasn't a long time before they changed again. Now the white kind of laws is being used still at this time. It is the same being used. So now there have been three changes in my lifetime. Now I am grown, grandchild, and I'm eighty-five years old on the twenty second of March.