Mohonk and the Smileys: A National Historic Landmark and the Family That Created It
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Chapter 5
The Conferences

"It would be most deplorable if this house should ever acquire the mercenary spirit and make the accumulation of money without higher ulterior aims the goal of its ambition." Albert K. Smiley, dedication of the Testimonial Gateway, October 14, 1908

As a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Albert Smiley was steeped in a tradition of concern for social problems and their solution. American Quakers were active in the movement for the abolition of slavery. The Underground Railroad was established with Quaker help. After the Civil War, Quakers were instrumental in efforts to aid freedmen. From the earliest colonial days they had boldly defended Native American Indians' right to a full life. With such a spirit of social activism it is little wonder that Friend Albert Smiley would find it necessary to do his part in seeking an end to previous hostile federal policy toward Indians and replacing it with a more enlightened one of peace and ultimate citizenship for Native Americans.

In the winter of 1879, Albert attended the annual meeting of the Board of Indian Commissioners in Washington, D.C. "Charges of corruption were made at that meeting against certain officers of the Indian Bureau by one of the members of the board," he recalled, "and a committee of the board was appointed to investigate them, of which I was made chairman." Careful investigation by him netted evidence against the three men, and Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz dismissed them from the Indian service. Schurz then called upon the board to investigate the whole Bureau of Indian Affairs. Smiley was again made chairman of the investigating committee. He later recalled that he "inspected the whole Indian Bureau, and particularly its methods of doing business. ... This is how I came at once to be deeply interested in Indian work."

One aspect of Indian affairs that disturbed Smiley was the lack of coordination in planning among people who sought to solve the "Indian question," as it was then known. The many organizations, public and private, had little or no communication with each other. It had been the practice of the Board of Indian Commissioners to invite the secretaries of all the religious denominations having charge of Indian work to Washington, D.C., once each year. For one day in joint session, reports of fieldwork and Indian affairs were discussed. "One short day seemed to me," noted Smiley, "totally insufficient time to thoroughly complete the discussion, and I tried in vain to have the meeting prolonged."

During an inspection tour of the Santee Sioux Agency in Dakota Territory, Smiley found himself frustrated over the difficult conditions for thorough discussions. He announced to a group of colleagues, "We will finish this discussion at Mohonk Lake, next fall." "I invited them all," he later noted, "to meet at Mohonk the ensuing autumn, and promised to have a large gathering to discuss the whole Indian question."

Lake Mohonk Conferences of Friends of the Indian: Discussing Native American Matters
"The service of the Lake Mohonk Conferences to the cause of Indian advancement can hardly be overemphasized." Loring Benson Priest, 1942

In 1883 invitations to the first annual Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian were sent to fifty people, including the Board of Indian Commissioners. The conference met in October as guests of Albert Smiley and his wife. Smiley suggested that the Board of Indian Commissioners could meet officially at the same time. That was a shrewd maneuver because it allowed the Mohonk Conference reports to be printed in the board's subsequent annual reports.

It also made sure that all the commissioners mingled with the nation's leading figures in Indian affairs amidst the congenial and beautiful surroundings of Mohonk. Albert considered it a matter of primary urgency "that those representing the Indian cause should arrive at clear and definite conclusions regarding the object to be attained, that the conference should be plainly set before the public in printed form, and as widely circulated as possible."

The conference chairmen were selected by Albert and possessed views generally in line with the host's goals. Yet Albert did not dictate to the conference. By selecting a presiding officer who possessed tact and diplomacy and who could cut off desultory discussion, Smiley silently guided the conference participants in seeking tangible goals and not spleen-venting accusations. As the yearly meetings continued at Mohonk, concepts were formulated and disseminated, and the conferences exerted increasingly wide influence. From 1883 to 1916, they played a significant role in the formation of United States Indian policies. Wrote author and Indian affairs scholar Loring Benson Priest, "Out of their sessions came programs which subsequently inspired much criticism, but which then represented the majority thinking of friends of the Indian. The policies they recommended were those which guided administration of Indian affairs during the next quarter century."

The high-minded sentiments and spirited discussions that characterized the conferences were followed by a chance for delegates to relax and mull over the proceedings. The conferences opened their sessions at 10 AM, adjourned for lunch at noon, and resumed at 8 PM after dinner. The early morning was left open for free time and wandering about the estate. The afternoons were often taken up with a longer carriage ride or trip to nearby Minnewaska. So enjoyable was the 1884 journey to Minnewaska that the evening session was late in starting because the delegates did not return from their pleasant trip until after dark. Such a schedule permitted debate without fatigue and loss of temper arising from overly long sessions.

The Mohonk Indian conferences brought together prominent white men and women from all aspects of concern for Indian affairs. Smiley invited secretaries of all the religious societies, the Senate and House Committees on Indian Affairs, army officers having dealings with Indians, members of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, heads of Indian schools, members of the Indian Rights Association and Women's National Indian Association, leading newspaper editors, and philanthropists. Complex social conditions and the then prevailing sentiment that white people could best create a government

policy toward Indians precluded Native American speakers until the 1889 conference. A random sampling of names in attendance at the conferences indicates not only the type of influential delegate but also the fact that many were frequent guests at Mohonk: Generals N.A. Miles, O.O. Howard, Clinton B. Fisk, and John Eaton; publishers Edwin Ginn and Henry O. Houghton; businessmen John Arbuckle, John D. Rockefeller, and Darwin R. James; clergymen Lyman Abbott, Theodore L. Cuyler, Bishop H.B. Whipple, and Cardinal James Gibbons; political and government leaders Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte, Senator Henry L. Dawes, and former President Rutherford B. Hayes; university president Andrew D. White; authors and magazine publishers Samuel June, Isabel Barrows, Edward Everett Hale, and William Hayes Ward; and reformers Samuel C. Armstrong, Alice C. Fletcher, Richard H. Pratt, Amelia S. Quinton, and Herbert Welsh.

After 1889, Indian leaders invited to address the conferences included Dr. Charles Eastman, Dr. Carlos Montezuma, Chester Cornelius, the Revered Sherman Coolidge, and Chapman Scenandoah. They expressed their opinions and mingled with the members. Often Indian pupils from various schools were guests. A few listed on the membership rolls and who spoke include J. DuBray, Hattie Longwolf, Dennison Wheelock, Samuel George, and Francis LaFlesche.

When the chairman rang his “five-minute bell” for the last time at the 1916 Lake Mohonk conference, it marked the end of a thirty-three-year campaign for government reform in Indian affairs. As a personal effort, the conferences reflect through their records and reports the unselfish and dedicated humanitarianism of Albert and Daniel Smiley. As a public event, the conferences represented the coalition of a remarkable and diverse group of influential men and women into a unified whole striving at Mohonk to secure a better life for the Indians. To Smiley and his associates it seemed wrong for the United States to segregate Indians on reservations, to deny them citizenship and, above all, to prevent them from sharing in American culture.

In the first decade of the conferences, spokespeople with strains of ethnocentrism favored Dawes’s Severalty Act, allotting reservation land into farms and selling the surplus for a trust fund to advance education and health care for Native Americans. By the second decade, such certitude became hotly debated, and a strong sentiment emerged favoring Indian cultural and religious preservation.

Mohonk’s efforts were unflagging. Charitable funds were solicited at the conferences to pay for legal protection for the Mission Indians, the Pueblos, the Pimas, and the Alaskan natives. Some of the Mohonk guests provided scholarships to send young Indians to college. The conferences underwrote the “Mohonk Lodge” at Colony, Oklahoma, and a pottery works at Laguna, New Mexico, that provided direct educational, cultural, and medical benefits for the Indians. By underwriting legal fees, the conferences played a major role in securing reservation land for the Mission Indians of Southern California.

Subsequent events proved the policies advocated at Mohonk to be a mixture of success and failure. As an influential group seeking to arouse public and governmental conscience, the conferences were an unqualified success. But after seeking the formal adoption of many of the changes that it

had advocated, Mohonk often found itself unable to see to the practical implementation of its theories in the political world of Washington, D.C.

Hopes for sound health, equality of opportunity, and full civil rights stood little chance of fulfillment in the face of political and private resistance to execution of the laws. The political mischief that afflicted the Indian Bureau—admitted by the commissioners and condemned by the crusaders—served to weaken the thrust of Mohonk's reforms. Moreover, looking back from present perspective, we see that some of the reform solutions that it advocated were impracticable, such as the Dawes Severalty Act; certain liberal or avant-garde positions of 1905 later became outmoded cultural notions.

Nevertheless, the work of the Lake Mohonk conferences leaves a legacy worthy of study. In 1883 the predominant tendency of the nation was to ignore or dispossess the Indians, although there was still to be killing ahead, including the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. By 1916 the attitude of the public and the government alike had been dramatically altered. Serious concern for education, health, and preparation for citizenship replaced persecution. Compassion and understanding began to supplant indifference and hostility. While historical treatment of Native Americans remains a blot on America's national reputation, a study of the Mohonk conferences reveals that during the period between 1883 and 1916 Albert and Daniel Smiley did much to change United States policy and bring about improvement in the treatment of Indians.

The name "Mohonk" became known throughout the land. In the 1960s the Smiley family transferred the 22,000 items of Indian conference records to Haverford College, where they are now used by researchers and students of American history.

Mohonk Conferences on the Negro Question: Addressing African American Conditions
"At its heart, the Negro Question is white racial prejudice, and consequently whites, not blacks, were in need of education." Albion W. Tourgée

Once Albert Smiley had established conferences to address Native American policy, he sought to apply the same blueprint to address other issues facing the nation. In 1890 the first Mohonk Conference on the Negro Question was held. Albert Smiley invited more than one hundred prominent religious, educational, political, and philanthropic leaders to Mohonk to discuss, as it was then called, "The Negro Question." During the twenty-five years following the end of the Civil War, African American citizens continued to suffer from lynchings, restricted rights, extreme racial prejudice, and paternalistic attitudes.

Albert Smiley was notably ahead of his time in sponsoring this audacious gathering focusing on an explosive subject. He asked his sister, Sarah Smiley—a fervent activist and human rights advocate—to be one of the featured speakers. In her presentation she recounted her efforts to aid African Americans: "Just at the close of the war I gave about three years of my life to this cause; and I look back upon them as those which educated *me* most, whatever they did for the Negro, they were so rich in experience. I went to relieve human suffering; but I soon found myself drawn into

this very line of work that has come before us this morning, and which seems to me the solution of the problem." She went on to explain the ways in which she offered aid to these people—whom she described as refugees—many of whom were left in extreme poverty.

Despite the Quaker sentiment to aid African Americans in their plight, the overall climate in this country was such that legal separation of the races continued to be the law of the land. This was exemplified, just a few years later in 1896, by the Supreme Court case Plessy vs. Ferguson, which upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation.

Attending the 1890 Mohonk conference was Albion W. Tourgée (a long-ago carpetbagger and novelist), uncompromising critic of white racism, and unswerving supporter of equitable national aid to education. He stunned his audience by noting that only white people were at the conference and identifying race prejudice as the cause, because many white guests would not appear at a conference attended by African Americans. Further, he condemned the South's "slave holding mentality," and Northern "do-gooders" for their blindness to injustice in their midst, for their paternalism, and for their assumptions that blacks would be better off for becoming "white at heart." The audience attacked Tourgée vigorously.

But the drama was not over. At the second conference, in 1891, A.L. Phillips, Field Secretary for the Colored Evangelization of the Southern Presbyterian Church from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, insisted that only Southerners had enlightened and true knowledge of race relations, and he reminded "do-gooders" that "unwritten laws" existed in the South forbidding social mingling of blacks and whites. His plea for formal observance of race separation angered conferees, many of them shouting "never, never!"

The Conferences on the Negro Question could not help but drown in the turbulent political and social times. Jim Crow laws and the Klu Klux Klan were on the rise, and whites were hesitant to broaden African American rights. Their fear of social and political implications thwarted their ability to address issues of prejudice.

Smiley reluctantly pulled the plug. Instead, he turned his own charitable impulses to inviting African American leaders Booker T. Washington and Harry Burleigh to address Mohonk guests and host "pass-the-hat" fundraisers for Tuskegee Institute and other colleges that served African American students.

These long-ago exchanges reflect the contending forces of change. Ethnicity and equal access to the "American dream" remain contentious social issues in the present day, reflecting the conspicuous presence of the past.

Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration: Seeking a Peaceful World

"A permanent tribunal [for international arbitration of disputes], *I want to urge first, second, last, and always a permanent tribunal. That is the thing … which must be rubbed into the public mind." Edward Everett Hale, 1895*

Albert Smiley's determination to host yearly conferences on arbitration, despite the wrath and scoffing he might incur from some circles, came from the strongly held conviction that the forces favoring arbitration of disputes among nations should unify their ranks. "It was a happy thought and has yielded rich fruitage," observed Smiley family friend, the Reverend Dr. Theodore L. Cuyler, in assessing the role of the Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration. As a Quaker, Smiley had long cultivated a desire to seek peace rather than wage war, to arbitrate rather than dictate. He was "impressed in the duty of intelligent and organized propaganda for the attainment of international peace through arbitration." It was in June 1895 that Albert Smiley called the first Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration. The time for such a gathering was in many respects ripe. The United States had been involved in encouraging arbitration of disputes in one form or another since 1871.

As historian Laurence M. Hauptman noted:

[the Mohonk Arbitration Conferences] *have been credited with having given impetus to the Hague Conference movement; the formation of the big-money peace establishment—the World Peace Foundation and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace—as well as reconstituting an older one, the New York Peace Society; the creation of the American Society of International Law; and the League to Enforce Peace. Historians, contemporary observers and participants have maintained that, besides contributing to the movement for international arbitration, the conferences spawned a furthering of world peace and international understanding, Pan-Americana, Anglo-American amity, and even a version of "Pax Americana." In addition to these interpretations, the conferences served one more fundamental and far-reaching purpose: they were the harbinger and prototype of the modern American foreign policy "think-tank"; the forerunner of such prominent organizations as the Foreign Policy Association and the Council on Foreign Relations. Originating during a decisive period in America's foreign relations, these international forums were the "first publicly organized elite groups in the United States for the regular dissemination of information about broad issues of foreign affairs and the theoretical discussion of foreign policy."* [Introduction to Index of the Proceedings of the Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration 1895–1916 (New York: Clearwater Publishing, 1976).]

Albert Smiley and dozens of his personally invited guests at the Mohonk conferences believed that the earlier attempts at arbitration were but the groundwork for the successful and permanent implementation of arbitration as a substitute for war. What better country was there to lead in the support of arbitration, the conference delegates asked themselves, than the United States of America?

The Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration were not peace conferences. At the first session of the initial gathering in 1895, Albert Smiley described his aims in calling the conference. The report of that year summarizes his statement; Smiley asked that "the discussion might not go into the subject of the horrors of war or of the doctrine of 'peace at all hazards,' but might be turned to the consideration of the means by which our own country might have all her disputes with

foreign lands settled by arbitration, and might bring other nations to join her as rapidly as possible ... ."

The most powerful and far-reaching address delivered at the 1895 gathering was by noted author Edward Everett Hale. "A permanent tribunal," he cried to the enthralled attendees. "I want us to urge first, second, last and always a permanent tribunal. That is the thing … which must be rubbed into the public mind." Hale's call at Mohonk for a court of permanent arbitration antedated the Hague Conferences by four years and occurred a full twelve years before Elihu Root laid down its implementation as "a chief duty upon the American delegation to the Second Hague Peace Conference to propose such a tribunal."

In 1896 the New York Bar Association had anticipated such a plan, and many of its members (who were participants in the conferences) submitted to President Grover Cleveland a plan for the constitution of a permanent court of arbitration. That plan was also given to Andrew D. White, who was later America's first chief representative at the Hague Conference, in 1899. White suggested various concepts and plans that had been discussed at Mohonk during the Hague deliberations. The soft-spoken White, who was a founder and first president of Cornell University and had served in the U.S. diplomatic service in Germany and Russia, was one of Mohonk's most enthusiastic supporters.

Among the hundreds of well-known people who attended the conferences between 1895 and 1916 were: Henry Demarest Lloyd, author; Baron Takahire of Japan; Wu-Ting-Fang of China; Senator Jim Gamboa of Mexico; Professor J. Rendel Harris of England; British Ambassador James Bryce; F.W. Holls, Secretary of the American delegation at the 1899 Hague Conference; Cardinal James Gibbons of New York; Robert Lansing, later Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson; Robert Treat Paine, President of the American Peace Society; William Jennings Bryan, Democratic presidential nominee and later Secretary of State under Wilson; William Howard Taft, President of the United States; Elihu Root, Secretary of State under Theodore Roosevelt; and John W. Foster, Secretary of State under Benjamin Harrison.

One of the peace-making achievements accomplished at Mohonk centered on domestic affairs. The 1916 agenda found former Republican President William H. Taft as presiding officer with William Jennings Bryan, former Democratic presidential candidate, as a featured speaker. These two rivals put on an amiable front, but it was noted that during the picture-taking of conference members, they were discreetly placed at some distance from each other.

With America's April 1917 entrance into World War I, Daniel Smiley and the leaders of the arbitration conference elected to cancel the 1917 session. The air of optimism dissipated. The guests and friends who attended the conference and who had such high hopes for the future of peace held nineteenth-century beliefs in reason, progress, and the future. Now the United States had entered the European "war of suicidal madness." The great European leaders had failed to keep peace, as had international institutions. The Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration ended. It is good that Albert K. Smiley, whom Andrew Carnegie called a "foremost apostle of peace," did not live to

see the end of his “peace dream.”

In the 1960s the Smiley family donated several thousand documents relating to the arbitration conferences to the Swarthmore College Peace Collection. The information contained in these papers provides a useful body of knowledge to those seeking insight into the complicated and delicate nature of international arbitration.