

# The biography of mary jemison

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Introduction The biography of Mary Jemison depicts three cultures, ly, the colonial frontier, the mid-late 18th century culture of the Seneca, as well as that of industrial American republic, and takes the perspective of a woman ‘residing among adversaries.’ Mary Jemison was born sometime between 1742-1743 to Jane and Thomas Jemison, Scotch-Irish parents who had immigrated to America on the Mary William. She was born during as they journeyed there and for fifteen years, she lived on a farm 10 miles north of modern Gettysburg. While she was fifteen, the Shawnees who were helping the French for the period of the Seven Year’s War assailed her friends and family. They captured her at around the year 1758 – several days subsequent to their marching through the frontier’s woods; they alienated her from her relatives and gave her moccasins. She later recounted having seen the red hair belonging to her mother on a scalp that the Shawnees were cleaning. They took her to Fort Duquesne (called Fort Pitt in the modern times) and gave her up to two women from Seneca for adoption. As a tradition, on losing a family member, the Seneca and a good number of tribal cultures adopt prisoners and incorporate them into their society. The two women who adopted Jemison had lost a brother. In her memoir, she expresses her gratitude and considers herself to have been very lucky for falling into the hands of this family since the women were good natured and kind. The tribe renamed her ‘ Dickewamis,’ a name that historian June Namias says loosely translates to ‘ two falling voices’ in Seneca (Dahl, para7). Over the next years, Jemison, now called Dehgewanus, learned the Senecas ways – she was very quick in learning the people’s language. In fact, she did this in below a year. Soon after starting her life with the Seneca, another ethnic group settled close by and the two women made her marry a

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Delaware by the name Sheninjee in the year 1760 (Ohiohistorycentral. org, para2). Jemison gave birth to two children, but only one lived on – their little girl who was born 1761 died shortly after birth. Soon after giving birth to their second child whom she named after her father ‘ Thomas’ who she missed very much, Jemison and her husband Sheninjee started a trip to Sheninjee's motherland in New York along the Genesee River. The journey was tough and long – through the route that they followed, it was approximately 700 miles. Her husband who had taken a different route from Dehgewanus in order to do some trapping and hunting became sick and passed on along the way. She went on with the trip to the strange new land where she lived as a widow. The clan relatives of her late husband made her a home at Little Beard's Town close to the present-day Cuylerville New York. This was Seneca people's heartland, keeper of Iroquois League's Western Door and she liked life along the Genesee. While here, she got married a second time to a Seneca by the name Hiokatoo, with whom she had an additional seven children. During this time, together with her adopted people, Dehgewanus lived peaceably and quietly (Cook, para8-11). Cook (2010) and Seaver further explain that the Revolutionary War ruined that calm. The American Army targeted Senecas and a number of other tribes since they took sides with the British. In the year 1779, George Washington sent an army of 5, 000 soldiers to annihilate the ability and will of the Senecas to fight. Little Beard's Town was their major target. Although the Seneca anticipated stopping the assailants with a well laid ensnare, the Americans, in spite of losses, were able to reach the neighboring Genesee Valley where they burnt the inhabitants; homes and fields. The Seneca ran away into the forest as the assailants drew near Little Beard's Town. Dehgewanus decided to go south of

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little Beardstown to the deserted village of Gadaho, where she found shelter together with her children as well as two other runaway slaves. She would live here for nearly 60 years. Alongside the Genesee banks, Dehgewanus went back to her Seneca ways, her second husband found her there, and they re-established their lives. They lived there for almost 20 years until the Americans invaded again. Although they held a great council, the greatest part of the Seneca homeland was yielded to settlers for sale. Dehgewanus and her family's land (roughly 18, 000 acres) were reserved. During those the tensions and pressures of the period between 1811 and 1817, Dehgewanus' three boys were murdered. Moreover, area residents severally tried to deprive the family of its lands. Dehgewanus however earned the respect of most of her neighbors – she never turned anyone in need away and the neighbors longed for the times when she would visit their little cabins for cakes and tea. Some of the residents even persuaded a writer and doctor to interview the “ Old White Woman of the Genesee,” which he did in the year 1823 November at a place known as Whaley's Tavern. He later published a book entitled ‘ The Life and Times of Mrs. Mary Jemison,’ preserving her story eternally (Cook, 2010). In her interview with Seaver, Jemison explains that Indian women had specific roles. They carried out all the labor in, as well as out of doors, which included attending to their families as well as other domestic tasks of small consequence, which required little labor, agriculture, among others. Jemison further explains that the task of an Indian woman is probably not tougher compared to that of white women. According to her, they have the duty of obtaining bread and fuel to as well as cooking. During summers, the women and children planted, tended and gathered corn leisurely. Together with her daughters, she had

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the whole to do, until her son attained a sufficient age of assisting them. He made her task easier by milking, chopping her wood, laboring in the cornfield, among others. However, following his death, she asserts o having had seen hard times constantly. As Namias points out, it is also important to note that during the lifetime of Jemison in Seneca, few women in black or white America possessed rights. However, compared to her European-American counterparts, Jemison had more power politically. Conclusion Apparently, Mary Jemison was an exceptional English woman. Rather than opting to return to her people and lifestyle, she decided to live among the Indians and learn everything about their culture into which she had been taken on, despite her abductors having had her relatives killed and scalped. She comfortably became a member of the Seneca where she strongly established herself and remained all her life. She passed on in the year 1833 at the age of 90. Works Cited Cook, Tom. Glimpses of the Past: People, Places, and Things in Letchworth Park History. 2010. Web. Dahl, Julia. L. Jemison, Mary (Dickewamis). 2008. Web. Namias, June. American National Biography. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Libraries, University Park. 2008. Print. Ohiohistorycentral. org. Mary Jemison. N. d. Web. Seaver, James E. A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison. Canandaigua, NY: J. D. Bemis. 1824. Print.