

## TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

### Lesson Title—Colonel Louis Cook (Atiatoharongwen), an Afro-Indian in the American Revolution

Created by Sean Gilligan

Grade: 9-12

Length of Class Period: 48 minutes (this will be a three period activity)

Inquiry (what essential questions are students answering, what problems are they solving, or what decision are they making or what decision are they making?)

- Why did Colonel Louis Cook help America in the American Revolution?
- What were Colonel Louis Cook's contributions in the American Revolution?
- What were struggles in Louis Cook's life and how did he overcome those challenges?
- What happened to pro-American Iroquois Indian communities after the American Revolution?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

- Students will interpret a biography of Colonel Louis Cook and interpret primary sources about his role in the American Revolution.
- Students will write a persuasive essay where they take a stand about renaming their high school after either Colonel Louis Cook or a different Revolutionary War hero.

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?)-(please attach)

*Louis Cook (Atiatoharongwen): 1740 to 1814 Biography Article*

*Louis Cook Primary Sources* (these primary sources were obtained from Darren Bonaparte's Wampum Chronicles website)

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

This lesson can be used as a part of an American Revolution unit. It is expected that students will have explored at least a textbook chapter and perhaps some other sources about the American Revolution before this lesson. The lesson will be three class periods in length (if your period ranges from 45 to 60 minutes). First, ask students what they know about African Americans and Native Americans in the American Revolution. Students can brainstorm this in

partners or trios. Then students will share their responses. After sharing, the teacher should point out that students are going to explore the life and contributions of Colonel Louis Cook (Atiatharongwen), an Afro-Indian (adopted Mohawk Indian who was half-West African and half-Abenaki Indian) who helped America in the American Revolution. First, the biography article is read and discussed. Please use the essential questions as discussion questions. Also, I encourage teachers to use maps of New York and Canada to better help students gain a geographical sense of the article and primary sources. An exit card activity can be used at the end of the first class session.

At the second class session, the Louis Cook primary sources are distributed. You can use as many of these sources as needed. There are plenty of primary sources, so you can have jigsaw groupings. Whatever is best for your class. Students should discuss in their groups what a particular primary source reveals about Colonel Louis Cook. Their insights should be written and then shared with the class. An exit card activity can also be used at the end of the second class session.

At the third class session, students will have a persuasive essay assignment. I have given a five paragraph essay assignment where students have to decide whether to rename Windham High School after Louis Cook or Bernardo de Galvez. You could vary this assignment by having the second choice of a Revolutionary War hero be anybody your students have explored (ex: Deborah Sampson, George Washington, John Paul Jones, etc.). For the arguments, students will have to provide evidence from the article and primary sources. Alternatively, an art project could be given where students create historical murals about Colonel Louis Cook.

Once the three days are completed, a good closure roundtable discussion question could be: How did the United States treat its Iroquois Indian allies (Akwesasne Mohawk, Oneida, Tuscarora) once the American Revolution ended? This question could be answered after first reviewing the essential questions.

### **How will you assess what students learned during this lesson?**

- Verbal responses
- Active pair or trio interpretations
- Written interpretations
- Exit cards
- Persuasive Essay: Renaming your high school after Colonel Louis Cook or a different Revolutionary War hero
- Alternative assessment: historical mural about Colonel Louis Cook

### **Connecticut Framework Performance Standards—**

#### Standard 1-Content Knowledge

##### 1.1 Significant events and themes in United States History

High School 10. Assess the significance of the evolving heterogeneity of American society (e.g. contributions of minority groups).

High School 13. Evaluate the role and impact that significant individuals have had on historical events.

Standard 2: History/Social Studies Literacy

2.2 Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including electronic media.

High School 6. Determine the central ideas of, and be able to summarize information from primary and secondary sources.

2.3 Create various forms of written work (e.g. essay) to demonstrate an understanding of history and social studies issues.

High School 18. Write arguments using discipline-specific content.

### **Louis Cook (Atiatoharongwen): 1740 to 1814**

The following information about Louis Cook (Atiatoharongwen) was obtained from the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* and Darren Bonaparte's website Wampum Chronicles along with other sources.

Louis Cook was born in 1740 in Saratoga, New York, as a slave on the Schuyler Plantation. His father was West African and his mother was Abenaki Indian. In 1745, a group of French soldiers and Kanawake Mohawk Indians attacked Saratoga. They took all the slaves from the Schuyler Plantation to be resold in Canada. A French army officer tried to take little Louis as his slave. Louis's mother cried out "Uh Nihawa!" ("He is my child!"). The French officer said in reply, "He is a Negro and he is mine!" The mother convinced the Kanawake Indians to adopt her and her son into the tribe. Mother and son were freed from slavery but Louis's father and the other slaves were sold to new masters at Montreal.

Louis's mother died while he was a child at Kanawake in Canada. He was then raised by a French priest (Father Jean-Baptiste Tournois) in this Mohawk village. Louis learned how to speak French and was baptized a Roman Catholic. He could speak Mohawk, Abenaki, French, and English, and later learned Oneida (similar to Mohawk). Louis also gained the Mohawk name "Atiatoharongwen" ("he who hangs from above"). As a teenager, Atiatoharongwen fought in the French and Indian War. The Kanawake Mohawk helped the French fight against the British. He took part in fighting at Carillon (Ticonderoga) and Oswego. Atiatoharongwen proved his bravery in battle and was put in charge of a group of Indian warriors at battles in Quebec. The French saw that Atiatoharongwen had great leadership skills.

The French lost the war and the British took over Canada. Atiatoharongwen missed the French and did not like the British. In general, the French treated Indians better than the British did. After the French and Indian War ended, he moved to the Mohawk village of Akwesasne in New York/Canada. As the 1770s went on, Atiatoharongwen realized that Americans wanted their freedom from the British. He saw his chance to get revenge against the British for beating his friends, the French. In 1775, Atiatoharongwen went to General George Washington and offered to help the Americans in any way needed. General Washington had him start helping by being a scout and messenger. In 1776, Atiatoharongwen came to General Washington and said he could recruit 400 to 500 Iroquois Indians (Mohawk, Oneida, and Tuscarora) to help America in the war. At first, one of Washington's generals said this was not a good idea. But Washington knew that America needed all the help it could get. Washington said yes to the offer of Indian help and by 1777, Atiatoharongwen was in charge of the Indian Rangers, a group of Mohawk, Oneida, and Tuscarora Indian warriors who fought for America's freedom. In 1777, the Indian Rangers were a big help at the important battle of Saratoga. At the Battle of Oriskany, the Indian Rangers fought against fellow Iroquois Indians who were helping the British. The Battle of Oriskany is considered one of the American Revolution's bloodiest battles. In 1779, Atiatoharongwen was promoted to lieutenant-colonel. He gained the nickname "Colonel Louis". In 1781, Atiatoharongwen and the Indian Rangers helped protect the Mohawk Valley from British Major John Ross's attacks.

The Indian Rangers fought with honor and bravery for America in the American Revolution. George Washington wrote and spoke of the great help that Atiatoharongwen gave to America. To show his appreciation, General Washington even gave a pipe with the initials "G.W." on it to Atiatoharongwen as a gift.

After America won the war, Atiatoharongwen moved to an Oneida village and married an Oneida woman named Marguerite Tewennihata. They would have many children. By 1789, he brought his family back to Akwesasne. Atiatoharongwen helped America by being a peace negotiator with tribes in the Ohio River Valley. Because of his bravery in war, Atiatoharongwen was named one of the chiefs at Akwesasne. He served as a leader there until his death in 1814. Sadly, he and other Akwesasne Mohawk leaders were forced to sell large amounts of their land to New York in the Treaty of 1796. Atiatoharongwen was upset about this because he had fought bravely for America, yet he was forced to sell most of his peoples' lands to New York. Even so, as an old man, Atiatoharongwen fought in the War of 1812 alongside his sons. He once again helped America fight the British. And he gave his life for America. Atiatoharongwen died in 1814 fighting to keep America free from being taken over by the British again.

So Louis Cook became a respected warrior and leader among his Iroquois Indian peoples. Even George Washington, a slave owner, showed respect for this Afro-Indian who had been born a slave on a plantation along the Hudson River in upstate New York. Sadly, Louis Cook (Atiatoharongwen) is an important figure in American and Canadian history who rarely appears in U.S. History textbooks.

## Louis Cook Primary Sources

The following primary sources are about Colonel Louis Cook (Atiatarongwen), an Akwesasne Mohawk Indian (half-West African, half-Abenaki Indian) who helped America in the American Revolution. These primary sources were obtained from Darren Bonaparte's Wampum Chronicles website.

After the skirmish at Lexington and the battle of Bunker Hill, General George Washington met Louis Cook at Cambridge, Massachusetts. Washington describes the encounter in a letter dated August 4, 1775:

“On the first instant, a chief of the Caughnawaga tribe, who lives about six miles from Montreal, came in here, accompanied by a Colonel Bayley, of Coos. His accounts of the temper and disposition of the Indians are very favorable. He says, they have been strongly solicited, by Governor Carleton, to engage against us, but his nation is totally averse: that threats as well as entreaties have been used, without effect; that the Canadians are well disposed to the English colonies, and if any expedition is mediated against Canada, the Indians in that quarter will give all their assistance. I have endeavored to cherish that favorable disposition, and have recommended him to cultivate them in return. What I have said, I have enforced with a present, which I understood would be agreeable to him; and he is represented as being a man of weight and consequence in his own tribe. I flatter myself, his visit will have a good effect. His account of General Carlton's force and situation of St. John's, corresponds with what we have from that quarter.”

General Washington was visited by Louis Cook again, as he noted in January 1776:

“On Sunday evening, thirteen of the Caughnawaga Indians arrived here on a visit. I shall take care that they be so entertained during their stay, that they may return impressed with sentiments of friendship for us, and that also of our great strength. One of them is Colonel Louis, who honored me with a visit once before.

Louis Cook and his Indian Rangers (a company of Oneida, Tuscarora, Kanawake Mohawk, and Akwesasne Mohawk warriors) were with an American force of 800 that was sent to relieve Fort Schuyler (Fort Stanwix) in August of 1777. They were ambushed by British troops and their Iroquois allies at Oriskany Creek in Oneida Territory, New York. Iroquois battled Iroquois with many losses. The Battle of Oriskany was one of the American Revolution's bloodiest battles. Reverend Dr. George A. Lintner of Schoharie, New York, shared the following account about Louis Cook in the Battle of Oriskany:

“A private soldier named Louis, a rough and daring old hunter who, after the Indian fashion, carried his knife and tomahawk with him, became so much excited in the heat of the battle, that one of his comrades occupying a tree next to him, asked him, “Louis,

what is the matter?' 'Matter enough,' said Louis, "there is one of the black serpents lying in the fork of a fallen tree and every time he rises up he kills one of our men. I can stand it no longer; either he or I must die.' As he said this he raised his rifle and fired. The Indian leaped into the air and fell dead across the fork of a tree which had sheltered him. Louis gave a wild Indian whoop and then ran up to his victim, tore off his scalp and, returning to his comrades, threw it down before them, saying: 'That fellow will do no more harm.'"

Peter Stephen Du Ponceau, a young French officer assigned to Baron Von Steuben met Louis Cook at Valley Forge in 1778. Here is what Du Ponceau wrote:

"Another anecdote now strikes my mind, which relates to the first Indian that I saw in the United States, and is also connected with my early recollections of my native country which were very fresh and vivid at that time. It was at Valley Forge, in the spring of 1778, sometime before the evacuation of Philadelphia by the British. I was walking one morning before breakfast, in a wood, not far from our quarters, when I heard at a distance a French fashionable opera song, sung by a most powerful voice, which the echoes reverberated. I feel tempted to give you the whole song, and here it is:

Ce que je dis est la verite meme  
Tous les tresors de' l' univers  
N'ont de valeur que par l' objet qu' on aime  
Que par la main dont ils nous sont offerts.  
Un bouquet qu' unit un brin d'herbes  
Donne par toi flatterait plus mon Coeur  
Il serait un don plus superbe  
Il ferait tout mon Bonheur.

[What I say is the truth  
All the treasures of the universe  
Only have a value by the object we love  
Or by the hand that offers them.  
A bouquet made of grass  
Given by you would please my heart  
It would be a more superb gift  
It would be total happiness.]

"I cannot describe to you how my feelings were affected by hearing those strains so pleasing and so familiar to me, sung by what seemed to be a supernatural voice, such as I had never heard before, and yet melodious and in perfect good taste. I thought myself for a moment at the Comedie Italienne, and was lost in astonishment, when suddenly I saw before me a tall Indian figure in American regimentals and two large epaulettes on his shoulders, my surprise was in extreme. I advanced towards him and told him in French *vous chantez parfaitement bien, Monsieur* [you sing perfectly well, Sir,] on this

he also appeared astonished, he extended his hand toward me saying *Ah! Mon pere, tu es Francais; je suis bien content de te voir; C' est que nous les aimons les Francais, pourquoi nous ont-ils abandonne?* [Ah! My father, you are French; I am well content to see you; It is that we love the French, why have you abandoned us?] I was struck with this situation and particularly with his calling me father. *C' est vous, said I, qui etes mon pere, je ne suis qu' un jeune home.* [It is you that is my father, I am but a young man.] *Ah!* replied he, *tous les Francais sont nos peres, C' est ainsi que nous les appelons, les autres ne sont que nos freres.* [All the French are our fathers, It is thus we call them, the others are only our brothers.] Then he began to explain to me that the English wanted them also to call them fathers, but that the Indians would not consent; the French alone were their fathers. He next asked me a number of questions about the King, the Queen, the royal family and whether they did not mean to reconquer Canada. I thought he never would have done."

"The conversation, however, took another turn, and he began to tell me who he was. *Je suis,* said he, *un sauvage de la nation des Abenakis; je m' appelle Nia-man-rigounant, ce qui veut dire en Francais l' oiseau pi vele.* [I am a savage from the nation of Abenaki; I am called Nia-man-rigounant, which means in French the bird *pi vele*.] This word *pi vele* is not in the dictionary, but I presume it is Canadian for variagated. He then told me that he had served the United States in the ill-fated invasion of Canada under Montgomery and that when our army retreated he had followed them, and had obtained the rank of Colonel, "*On m' appelle ici,*" said he, "*Colonel Louis; c' est le nom que j' ai recu au bapteme, car,*" added he, "*je suis bon Chretien et bon Catholique.*" [One calls me here Colonel Louis, it is the name which I received with the baptism...for I am a good Christian and a good Catholic.] While this conversation was going on, we reached the Baron's quarters, who received him cordially and invited him to breakfast. After the repast was over, I again had a long conversation with him, in which he told me that he had been educated by the Jesuits of whom he spoke with great respect. They had taught him reading and writing and many other things which he enumerated. He had some knowledge of vocal music and I am convinced that with a little more teaching, he would have been a valuable acquisition to the French opera, where I have never heard a voice of such extraordinary power, and at the same time susceptible of modulation. I heard he was in the service of the United States, and had the rank of Colonel. In what manner he was employed, or what became of him afterwards, I never knew. All I can say is that I parted with him with much regret, and never saw him since."

General Philip Schuyler sent Colonel Louis Cook on a mission to destroy British warships. Here is what General Schuyler wrote about this mission in March of 1778:

"Reflecting that Congress might perhaps have in Contemplation the Reduction of Niagara on our Expedition into Canada thro Ontario, I have engaged Louis, commonly called Colonel Louis a friendly Cahnawaga and [ ] of sense and Enterprize who is going into Canada by the way of Oswegatchie with three or four trusty Oneidas to burn if

possible the Enemy's Vessels on Ontario if not to attempt the Destruction of those at St. John's and have promised a thousand Dollars in Species as a Reward if the one or the other is accomplished. I hope for the Approbation of Congress. Louis who expects to return in less than Forty days is also charged to bring me the exact account he can procure of the Enemy's force in Canada, the posts occupied by them and the numbers at each post to inform him if possible what military operations the Enemy mean to prosecute from Canada in the ensuing Campaign and to engage some our Caghnawaga Friends to give the earliest Intelligence of the movement of the Enemy and what provisions and military Stores may be sent either to St. John's or up the St. Lawrence."

Schuyler wrote this letter in July 1778 to General George Washington about Louis Cook's mission into Canada:

"Two days ago Col. Lewis the Indian returned from Canada by way of Oneida—he left the neighborhood of Caughnawaga in the beginning of June, as a reward was offered in Canada for apprehending him he did not dare to venture amongst the inhabitants. His Caghnawaga friends assured him that no troops had been sent up the river St. Lawrence this spring, that no preparations were making for any force to come thro' Lake Champlain, that Brant had not been able to prevail on any of the Caghnawagas to go the westward, that he understood a few of the Canosedago Indians would accompany him. That a thousand Otawas and Chippaways from Lake Huron were to join the Senecas as Brandt gives out to desolate the frontiers."

Colonel Louis Cook was able to gather lots of information for the American side. Consequently, Joseph Brant and his sister Molly Brant (Mohawk Indians who fought for the British) kept tabs on Louis Cook. Molly's friend, Mary Hill, was the Mohawk mistress of General Philip Schuyler. Thus, Mary was able to get information from General Schuyler and pass it along to Molly Brant. Here is an example of intelligence that made it to British Captain Al Fraser (letter written by him on November 5, 1780):

"She (Mary Hill) informed Miss Molly (Molly Brant) that the St. Regis Indian named the Negroe (Louis Cook) had been at Rhode Island, and was charged by the Commander in Chief of the French troops with a great many letters to Canadians, English, and Indians, with which he set off for St. Regis (Akwasasne) from Schenectady five weeks ago, and that she had once been engaged herself to come along with him—She further says that some of the principal Indians were told in confidence that the Rebels were determined to invade Canada this winter or early in the Spring by three different Routes. And they said that their designs upon Canada might fail of success, yet they were sure of reducing the upper posts, as they were determined at all costs to take Carleton Island, which wd. Oblige the higher Garrisons to surrender for want of provisions—She says Schuyler was himself to command this latter enterprise.

This woman also confirms the late news respecting General Gates Army and likewise that Benedict Arnold is going into New York.

There are certainly two Indians which always reside at the village of St. Regis for the purpose of conveying letters and intelligence of all our movements to the Rebels. I hope to be able to give Your Excellency their names by next opportunity.”

After the American Revolution ended, Colonel Louis Cook lived for a few years in an Oneida Indian village. It was there that he married an Oneida woman named Marguerite Tewennihata. By 1789, Cook had moved back to Akwesasne but he still maintained connections with his Oneida in-laws and friends. The following is from a manuscript petition by Louis Cook to the Great Council of the State of New York, at the Albany Council-Fire dated March 24, 1806. In the petition, he complains that promises made to the Oneida Indians and to his kin of compensation for their efforts in the American Revolution have not been fulfilled:

“Brothers, You know that I was faithful to you, and fought with you, in your Battles, during the great struggle with Great Britain, and I was then promised that neither I, nor my Children, should ever suffer, or be in want. I am now come here Brothers, to tell you, that this I feel, not that anything has been kept from me, by you my Brothers, or that you have been unkind to me, but that after the monies you have agreed should every year have been paid to the Oneida nation...by your commissioners to them, it has not, for these many years, been distributed, as it ought, my wife and her sister, who belong to that nation, have not received their part of it, or any thing at all for these sixteen years, and altho’ some part of it had once been given into the hands of a white person for them, by one of the Chiefs, it was afterwards taken back by him and spent in frolicking...”Signed “Lewis Cook X his mark”