

Tradition lives on:

# Tuscarora Nation accepts unique Maid of the Mist garment from Lewiston

**BY TERRY DUFFY**  
Editor-in-Chief

Last month, the Town of Lewiston took part in a special presentation with the Tuscarora Nation. Held Aug. 28 at the Nation House on the Tuscarora Reservation, the event celebrated the life of Lelawala, daughter of Eagle Eye, chief of the Ongiras, a native tribe long extinct, as the Maid of the Mist.

According to a historical account found online at [www.firstpeople.us](http://www.firstpeople.us), "Long ago, the peaceful tribe of the Ongiras lived beside the Niagara River. For an unknown

reason, Indians were dying and it was believed that the tribe must appease the Thunder God Hinum, who lived with his two sons at the base of the Falls.

"(At) first, the Indians sent canoes laden with fruit, flowers and game over the Falls, but the dying continued. The Indians then began to sacrifice the most beautiful maiden of the tribe, who was selected once a year during a ceremonial feast. One year, Lelawala, daughter of Chief Eagle Eye was chosen.

"On the appointed day, Lelawala

From left Tuscarora Nation Historian Vince Shiffert, Barbara Bracalello Cich and Town of Lewiston Historian Marjorie L. Maggard at the Aug. 28 presentation.

appeared on the river bank above the Falls, wearing a white deerskin robe with a wreath of woodland flowers in her hair. She stepped into a white birch bark canoe and plunged over the Falls to her death. Her father, heartbroken, leaped into his canoe and followed her."

According to the account, Lela-



wala found that a water snake that had been lying at the bottom of the river would return on a yearly basis and kill her people.

"On spirit, Lelawala told her people to destroy the serpent. Indian braves mortally wounded the snake on his next yearly visit to the village. Returning his lair to the river, the snake caught his head on one side of the river and his tail on the other, forming a semi-circle

and the brink of the Horseshoe Falls. Lelawala returned to the cave of the God Hinum, where she reigns as Maid of the Mist."

Town of Lewiston Historian Marjorie L. Maggard recalled past celebrations by the Tuscarora Nation presented in Lelawala's honor.

"A contest (was) held for a maid to be selected, and a costume was made for each maid," she said.

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