Southwest of the Iroquois, who once inhabited New York, between them and the territory of the Mound Builders that, longer ago lived further to the south and west, was the country of the Eries. The mastodon and the mammoth were the oldest of creatures of which we have definite knowledge, except those represented by the fossils in the rocks, that lived in the basin of Chautauqua Lake. The Eries were the first human beings of which we are fully informed, that had fixed abodes in the County of Chautauqua. Archaeological investigation and Indian tradition, however, tell us that Huron, Algonquin, and other Indian races inhabited there before them.

The territory of the Eries once included a portion of southwestern New York and western Pennsylvania, and extensive regions in Ohio along the southern shore of Lake Erie, and perhaps a part of the territory once occupied by the Mound Builders.

Of the history of the Eries we have but a limited knowledge, for no European ever visited them while they were a distinct people, except it may have been by the Frenchman, Stephen Brule in 1615. Aside from Indian tradition, such accounts as we have of them are mostly derived from casual mentions made by the early Jesuits of Canada, and fuller accounts that they gave us of their destruction by the Iroquois in 1656, and the brief references to them made by David Cusie* in his History of the Iroquois, written nearly a hundred years ago, and by references to them made by Elias Johnson and other Indian writers.

* Note: David Cusie was a Tuscarora Indian, and a Baptist minister of some education. His history of the six Nations is regarded by students of Indian lore as a valuable book of Indian history containing matters of much truth and importance, notwithstanding its many absurdities.
According to Cusio, the Eries, whom he calls the Kenneshekeroneasea, sprung from the Senecas when that people were a separate independent nation. This happened before the discovery of America, Cusio says it was three hundred fifty years before that event. His chronology, however, is not regarded as always reliable. He says, further, that it is supposed that sovereignty was at some time conferred upon the Eries by the senate of the Five Nations, and that they at first occupied in New York the country between the Niagara and Genessee Rivers, and that they became a numerous and powerful people. According to Elias Johnson the Eries were one of three tribes, all known as the Squawkhows.

Of these tribes the Kathwaks lived on the Eighteen Mile Creek south of Buffalo, and were later destroyed by the Iroquois. The Eries, we are told by him at that time, lived west as far as Erie, Pennsylvania. The people who retained the original name (Squawkhows) probably lived on the banks of the Genessee River and were engaged in wars with the Iroquois until they were subdued by them long ago.

Eageneau, the Jesuit, informs us that their name "Erie" is derived from the multitude of wild cats found in their territory. These animals were of large size, probably a species of lynx. Lake Erie was called Chat Lake by the French because of the wild cats on its southern shore, and the people there the nation "des Chat".

The Senecas called the Eries "Je-go-sa-sa". Various other names have been applied to them, mostly derived from the word "Erie" or cat.

The earliest mention made by Cusio of Chautauqua Lake is in connection with an incident that occurred, according to his chronology, long before America was discovered. A band of warriors was sent by the Senecas to attack the ottau-ways, whose territory then lay between Lake Erie and the Ohio. They advanced above Chautauqua Lake, which he spells "Catishgweah" and made an encampment. One of their number passed a small brook and there discovered a strange greyish animal resembling a dog. Another warrior, a little later, went to
attack it, and was taken with a pestilence influenced by the animal, and died. The pestilence soon extended to the other warriors, and many died. A few escaped by at once leaving the camp. This led to a war between the Senecas and the Ottaw-was that lasted many winters.

Cusio tells of a famous queen (named Yagowana), who, at some time after the League of the Iroquois was established, resided outside of the fort Kuhanauka, in a long house called the Peace House. She had great influence with the people of the several nations. Her authority extended over twelve forts. She was called the Mother of Nations, each of which sent her a wampum belt as a mark of respect.

When the Messissaugers were at war with the Five Nations, she admitted two of the warriors of the latter nation into her house, and while they were smoking the pipe of peace, a party of Messissaugers came and claimed that the two warriors of the Five Nations had killed a young prince of their people. She, in consequence, betrayed the two warriors and they were killed by her direction. She then repaired to Fort Kauquatkey, situated on Lake Erie, perhaps the fortified Erie village in the Town of Aipley, and conspired with the commander of the Erie forces there to wage war against the Five Nations.

A bloody war followed. The Eries were entrapped by a stratagem. One of the warriors of the Five Nations, dressed as a bear, was seated in the path a little distance in front of the Eries; who, thinking that the warrior was a bear sitting at his ease, pursued it and were led into an ambush, which resulted in six hundred of the Eries being slain. This war continued, and Fort Kauquatkey was attacked, and a siege continued several days, but through the powerful influence of Queen Yagowana, the Eries were left in entire possession of the country. The scene of this war was perhaps in the Counties of Cattaraugus and Chautauqua.

In the "Jesuit Relations" for 1648, (Page 46), it is said,

"The lake named Erie was formerly inhabited, on its southern coast, by certain people whom we call the Nation of the Cat, who have been obliged, at last, to withdraw inland, in order to get away from their enemies, who are more toward the west. These people of the Cat have a number of fixed villages, for they cultivate the ground and are of the same language as our Hurons."
William M. Beauchamp, in his "History of the Iroquois" infers that the Eries were then probably in the southern parts of Cattaraugus and Chautauqua Counties, and that to their towns there we may assign the Massawomackes, so much dreaded in the early days of Virginia.

He says, further, that "as the birth place of a captive to the Oneidas, the name Genteietou, the chief Erie town alone has come down to us."

Cusio concludes his "History of the Six Nations" with the statement that "the Eries declared war against the Five Nations, and a long and bloody war ensued. At last the Eries were driven from the country, and it was supposed that they joined with some southern nations; after which the kingdom enjoyed (peace) without disturbance for many years."

This event, the final battle, and the overthrow of the Eries, occurred in 1656, after which, many Eries fled from their country, others were received into the Seneca nation, and now the blood of the Eries flows in the veins of many of that people. Their lands in Chautauqua County afterwards became the hunting and fishing grounds of the Senecas, and so continued until the treaty of Big Tree, made in 1797, when they were surrendered by the Senecas to the white people, reserving to the Indians the right to hunt and fish in the county.

Little more does history or tradition tell us of this people, who for two centuries at least, inhabited Chautauqua County before Europeans came there. From all the accounts we have, the Eries were a brave and warlike people. Parts of their country were infested by rattle-snakes, and they fought with poisoned arrows. They had wars with, and were long a terror to the Iroquois and neighboring nations, but little has been preserved of the history of those wars."

* Note: See further Edson's History of Chautauqua County, published in 1894, at pages 43-68 inclusive.
The Eriee are also believed to have been great hunters. In the old abandoned village of Ripley, situated on the shore of Lake Erie in our county, were found the bones of the beaver, moose, elk, turtle, wild cat, and the mammoth. The wolf, bear, and the deer; the pine martin, and all the smaller game, in great numbers, inhabited our county. Once the buffalo and the panther lived there; the poisonous rattle-snake, and a black snake of large size inhabited there, until after it was settled by white men. The remains of beaver dams were also abundant in the county.

The Eriee practiced agriculture to a limited extent. By a long process of burning and hacking with axes of stone, they cleared tracts of land which they rudely cultivated with hoes of wood and bones. They, like other Huron-Iroquois people, raised corn, beans, gourds, pumpkins, sunflowers, hemp, and tobacco. From their relative superiority and their having fixed places of abode, they became more advanced in the arts of life than the other wandering tribes of America.

Very valuable information has been gathered respecting them by archaeologists, who have made scientific examinations of their earthworks, burial places, and stone implements left in the county, especially by Arthur C. Parker, State Archaeologist, who made a scientific and thorough examination of the abandoned Erie village, and burial place in the Town of Ripley, on the shore of Lake Erie, in the County of Chautauqua; also on the McCullough farm in the Town of Gerry, and at various other places, especially in the Conewango and Cazenovia valleys. Aboriginal remains are abundant in our county, enclosed villages, many of the remains of which are visible to this day. One circular earthwork, entirely undisturbed, in a grove of original forest trees, has been recently discovered near the village of Sinclairville. Many burial places and evidences of rudely cultivated tracts of land are well known. Stone implements are found on almost every farm.

These remains were not, however, the work of a contemporaneous people. The presence of European implements, the condition
of the earth works and ash heaps, indicate that it has not been long since some of their fires have been put out; while other remains show a much greater antiquity. Burial places known as ossuaries, arrows, and stone implements of a more ancient finish, some the work of the Mound Builders, some of Algonquin and Huron races, and some believed to be even of Senquishu manufacture are found. The evidence of the occupation of our county by the Senecas of the Six Nations is plainly to be seen, later still.

The religious ideas and legends of the Eries were like those of kindred Huron-Iroquois people, from whom they were the off-shoots. Their beliefs were only such as nature taught them. They were a rude and unclutivated people and near to nature. They claimed kinship with the birds and animals, and thought them to have a superior and mysterious wisdom. Their God they saw in the clouds, and His voice they heard in the wind and the thunder. They symbolized their belief in marvelous stories, such as all primitive people fancy, for the human mind is one of nature’s products, like the rocks and mountains, but as the rocks and mountains, after a long process of time, yield to nature’s superior forces. So do primitive beliefs yield to culture and scientific research, retaining only the essential and vital principal that nature teaches.

Cusic tells us that they believed their race began with the fall of a woman from above, alighting upon a turtle’s back as it arose from the sea, becoming an island and at length the continent of North America. Upon the turtle’s back twins were born; one of a good and the other of a bad mind. He tells of the conflicting influences that these opposing minds had thereafter upon their race for good and evil. He tells of the Holder of the Heavens who represented the Huron-Iroquois Deity, who conducted the Five Nations to their permanent homes in New York, instructed them in their moral duties, gave them dogs to hunt with, and seeds to plant. He tells of their faith in marvelous stories; of great, horrid serpents; flying heads; astonishing giants; of the big Quis Quis which he suggests may have been the mammoth. Some of these legends he represents in his history by rude
Gusio relates their legend of an enormous mosquito, the
even more ancient; and of witches more versatile than those of Old Salem; witches that could turn themselves into wolves and foxes; and when closely pursued could hide their identity by changing themselves into stones and rotten logs. Fifty of these witches, he says, were burned near Onondaga Lake by order of the Iroquois, long before the days of witchcraft in Salem.

Gusio relates their legend of an enormous mosquito, the ancestor of its species, that invaded the Onondaga country, and with his long bill sucked the blood of many warriors, and committed such depredations as to cause the people to call to their aid the Holder of the Heavens, who chased the monster to the borders of the Great Lakes and all around the country, and at last succeeded in killing it near the Onondaga Lake. But this heartless creature took a cruel and pestiferous revenge by turning the drops of his blood, as he died, into little mosquitoes, which thereafter infected the salt marshes of the Onondaga country, and which, even to this day, are inflicting a malicious and unnecessary cruelty upon the neutral and innocent white people, that since, in some way, have come into the possession of all the Indian lands.

These legends were the romances of a rude people, which, like the stories of the Sphinx, Robin Hood, Jonah and the whale, were innocently told by, and to, unlettered people, not so much for the truth they were supposed to have, as the lessons that they taught. Accomplished writers in the past, and of the present day, indulge in fiction with no more foundation for their facts, but with the legitimate purpose of pointing a moral and adorning a tale.

With Champlain there came from France missionaries of the order of St. Francis. In 1625, the Franciscans were followed by the Jesuits, who instructed the Indians of the north and west, and labored for one hundred and fifty years among them with unbounded zeal. These Jesuits annually transmitted to their superiors in France, full and careful reports of their doings; descriptions of the Indians and of their manners and customs. Stained and worm-eaten books containing these reports are preserved in Paris, and are called
the "Relations of the Jesuits". They hold a high place among historians as authority, and are regarded as authentic and trustworthy. The Jesuits and all travelers and writers, familiar with the subject, agree that the customs of all the Huron-Iroquois nations, which includes the Eries, closely resemble each other.

Parkman says "at intervals often of twelve years; the Huron-Iroquois, Neutrals, and other kindred tribes, were accustomed to collect bones of their dead and deposit them with great ceremony in a common place of burial. The whole nation was sometimes assembled at this solemnity, and hundreds of corpses, brought from temporary resting places, were inhumed in a capacious pit. From this hour, they believed, the immortality of their souls began, that they took wing, as some affirmed, in the shape of pigeons; while the greater number declared they journeyed on foot and in their own likeness, to the land of shades, bearing with them the ghosts of wampum belts, beaver skins, bows, arrows, and pipes, kettles, beads, and rings, and buried them in a common grave." These burial places are known as ossuaries, many of which existed in Chautauqua County, several being in the Town of Gar. y, near Sinclairville, which have been examined by the writer of this article; some of which were upon the farm, in that town, owned by Benjamin L. Harrison, of Dunkirk.

Many Indians, we are told, believed in a spirit world, or rather a land of shades, which they supposed existed far beyond the setting sun, where, in their vague imaginations, perpetual summer reigned, and the music of singing birds was always heard,--a phantom world, where only the apparitions of mountains and valleys, forests and rivers existed. The deer, the antelope, the bear, and the panther were its inhabitants,--ghosts of departed and once living creatures. This "Happy Region" they believed, "was peopled with swarms of spirits, who applied themselves to exercises and diversions as their fancies led them. Some were pitching the figure of a quoit, others were tossing the shadow of a ball, others were breaking the apparition of a horse, and multitudes employed themselves upon ingenious handi-
crafts, with the souls of departed utensils." Not all their dead found their way to the spirit world. Brabeuf, the Jesuit, says, "As the spirits of the old and the children, that are too feeble for the march to the Land of Shades, are forced to stay behind, lingering near their earthly villages, where the living often hear the shutting of their invisible cabin doors, and the weak voices of disembodied children driving birds from their corn-fields."

Bryant has expressed their belief in the "Indian Girl's Lament for her Lover."

'Twas I the broidered mocsen made,
That shod thee for that distant land;
'Twas I thy bow and arrows laid
Beside they still cold hand;
Thy bow in many a battle bent,
Thy arrows never vainly sent.

With wampum belts I crossed thy breast,
And wrapped thee in the bison's hide,
And laid the food that pleased thee best,
In plenty by thy side,
And decked thee bravely, as became
A warrior of illustrious name.

Thou'rt happy now, for thou hast passed
The long dark journey of the grave,
And in the land of light, at last,
Hast joined the good and brave;
Amid the flushed and balmy air,
The bravest and the loveliest there.

Yet, oft to thine own Indian maid
Even there thy thoughts will earthward stray,
To her who sit where thou wert laid,
And weeps the hours away;
Yet almost can her grief forget,
To think that thou dost love her yet."

The burial places of the Eries furnish evidence of this care and affection for their dead, which appears to have been fully as great as that of civilized people. The scientific examination made of the ancient Erie village at Ripley, by Arthur C. Parker, shows that grounds had been set apart from those occupied by that people as a village, for a cemetery for the burial of their warriors, men, women, and children, in graves that had been made by rude implements, at proper depths, in which the dead were buried in appropriate positions, often with a carved clay pipe, or a finely shaped earthen pot that had probably contained food for the departed one while on the way to the Happy Land. Sometimes a mother and a child were buried as
if in each other's embrace. These graves contained other evidences of their consideration for the dead, as pronounced as that of an enlightened people.

The homes of the Eries had been longer in our county than ours have been. They were as strongly attached to the soil as we. The forest-bordered streams and lakes had been familiar for generations to their race. Long had their legends and traditions been told by their rude firesides. Long had the Indian girl gathered wild flowers and her pleasant voice been heard in its wild woods, where now are green fields, and the noise of the steam cars and factories are heard. Yet how little do we know of their history. The only full and authentic accounts we have of the fierce struggle resulting in their overthrow in 1656, is told by the Jesuits, LeMoyne, LeMercier, DuQuesne, Chaumanot, and Debalon. Then their fires went out at once, as that of the sun when it goes down in the west at the close of the day, in the waters of the Great Lake to which they gave their name, and which is so familiar in their history, leaving all in darkness, with only their graves to tell their story.

"But they are gone
With their old forests wide and deep
And we have built our homes upon
Fields where generations sleep.

"Their fountains slake our thirst at noon,
Upon their fields our harvest waves,
Our lovers soo beneath their moon,
Let us spare, at least, their graves."