The Gazette

MARCH 25, 1995 \$1.25

Oka: the guns point inward

5 years after the crisis, Kanesatake remains an armed camp

WILLIAM MARSDEN THE GAZETTE

It was like a southern lynching - the night the "critters" showed up.

Shortly before midnight, as most of Kanesatake's 1,130 residents were turning in, seven men roared up to Serge Simon's light green bungalow in two heavyduty pickup trucks and two American cars.

Lined up 50 feet from his front door, they aimed their headlights through his windows, threatened to kill his family, shouted obscenities at his wife, shot automatic weapons into the air and lobbed three flares onto his roof and porch, starting small fires.

Just another night out at Kanesatake? Not really. But what happened to Simon last June 5 is not unique.

This spring will mark the five-year anniversary of the beginning of one of the most wrenching Indian crises this country has ever witnessed.

Yet though the heady days of the Oka crisis are a distant memory, Kanesatake remains an armed camp. The only difference is the guns are pointing inward.

Once a community united in common cause, Kanesatake has emerged from the Oka crisis in the tragic image of a modern-day Dodge City.

Criminal gangs operate almost with impunity while the community's political leaders not only remain silent but also appear to encourage the situation through their policies and actions.



Serge Simon and his family have been harassed by the "critters," Kanesatake thugs. He says the community is terrified.

For example, joining in the fun of terrorizing the Simon family, witnesses said, was Robert Gabriel. As the elected council chief in charge of justice and security he is, essentially, the law in Kanesatake.

But in Kanesatake not everything is as it seems and the law often means no law.

Although Simon complained to the Sûreté du Québec, no charges were ever laid against Gabriel or anyone else for threats against his family.

Simon's sin had been to speak out against the band council's housing policy and the lack of law and order in the community.

Five months earlier Gabriel had beaten up another Mohawk who had criti-

cized the council at a public meeting. Nobody made a complaint. No charges were laid.

Though he claims not to condone the gang violence. Grand Chief Jerry Peltier does little to stop it and in fact wields it as an effective political weapon. It's evidence, he says, that Kanesatake is a "cauldron ready to explode" unless extensive land claims are settled.

So Kanesatake has become an unholy alliance between thugs and the band council. Because of Peltier's inaction, the outlaws – derisively referred to by the community as "critters" – enjoy a relative sanctuary. Peltier constantly warns the Süreté du Québec to stay out of the com-

munity or "force will be met with force."

The result is that a small group of about 20 people openly flout the law, and the average citizen pays the price in fear and terror.

Car thefts, assaults, drunk driving, drug dealing and gun trafficking go largely uninvestigated and consequently unpunished.

The federal government has poured more than \$14 million into the community since 1990, buying up 157 properties from whites, most of whom are only too

PLEASE SEE KANESATAKE. PAGE AG

M Bingo Magic. PAGE A6

Kanesatake: an unholy alliance between thugs and the band council

If the law and the police are not going to help us, then who the hell will?' asks one reserve resident

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

eager to move out of Kanesatake. But in what often appears to be ran-dom, pointless violence, gang mem-bers have robbed, looted and/or vandalized many of these homes shon after their former owners moved out.

Mitchen cupboards, appliances, light fixtures and, in one case, an above-ground swimming pool have been ripped out and sold off. No one has been arrested.

With no effective system yet of delegating the homes, more than 50 have been illegally occupied by Mohawks. Some of these people were desperately in need of housing. But others, like some of the gang mem-bers and members of the band counbers and members of the band coun-cil's security force, the Watch Team, took possession of the more expen-sive properties when they already had homes of their own. One cot-tage is an outlet to sell illegal tobac-

tage is an outlet to sen megan cose co.

Drug trafficking has become a big problem as some gang members began last year cultivating marijuana on federally owned farms purchased for the community. Residents say schoolchildren are hired to cultivate the pot at \$100 a night.

Some of the newly purchased government homes are being used for hydroponic marijuana cultivation,

hydroponic marijuana cultivation,

they said.

Some residents, like Norman Simon, sympathize with the marijuana growers. "There are no jobs around. They're just trying to make money."

But other residents see it as another example of the anarchy that pre-vails at Kanesatake.

vails at Kanesatake.

, "The cops aren't doing anything about it even though they know everything that goes on here," one resident who asked to remain anonymous said of the Sûreté du Québec and the RCMP. "If the law and the police are not going to help us, then who the hell is?"

Three Kanesatake citizens met

last October with federal Justice Department officials and the RCMP, both to inform them of the lawless-riess in the community and to complain about the inaction of police. The citizens, who didn't want to be quoted by name, said these meetings appear to have had no effect.

The only security in Kanesatake is

appear to have had no effect.

The only security in Kanesatake is
the Watch Team - a largely untrained group of eight people paid
up to \$425 a week to patrol the community. Quebec does not recognize munity. Quebec does not recognize it as a legal security force. Ottawa, however, pays the salaries of team members through an employment program run by Human Resources Development Canada.

The team reports to Robert Gabriel. Many community members 'claim that it exists more as a warn-

Gabriel. Many community members claim that it exists more as a warning system of impending police raids than as a protection service for citi-

than as a protection acceptance also means serious car accidents go officially unreported, thereby jeopardizing insurance claims and investigation for the desired for the des ouzing insurance claims and investi-gations into drunk driving. Robert Gabriel and the Watch Team re-fused to allow police to investigate an accident this month in which a pickup truck (lipped over and a girl was sent to hospital with a broken rollar bone.

Though summoned the night of the attack on Serge Simon, the Sureté du Québec never came to his tyescue. While his children huddled in the basement, Simon held off his statackers with a bunting rifle. Their faunts and threats lasted until 3:30 a.m. when they suddenly decamped. "We're not finished with you." Robert Gabriel was heard to say.

"We're not finished with you,"
Robert Gabriel was heard to say.
And he was as good as his word.
Last November, gang members dug
up Simon's water line and disconnected it from a common well. The
band council made no effort to stop
the action. Simon had to get a court
order in St. Jérôme to force the
council to reconnect the line.
Simon has since sued Robert
Gabriel and the other critters:
Robert's brother Gary Gabriel, one
year younger at 28, his cousin
Bradley Gabriel, 24, and their
friends Kirk Lessard, 24, Carlos
Nelsen, 20, and Jason Gabriel, 23.
Together they boast a list of criminal
convictions for assault, drunk driving, theft and uttering death
threats. Lessard was recently
charged with compiracy to traffic in

illegal firearms. In these cases, they were either eaught off the territory or voluntarily surrendered after making deals with the police. Simon is also suing the band coun-cil and the Sortet do Ouebee for failing to protect him and his fami-by.

. What's intriguing is that the band

What's intriguing is that the band council is paying the legal bills for Robert Gabriel and the critters. Simon's ordeal was another in a long list of menacing actions that send a troubling message to the community Don't speak out. Don't make trouble. Toe the line.

"Everybody's terrified," Simon said. "It really concerns a hell of a lot of people."

of people.

Fear and a growing sense of hopelessness are keeping citizens away from band council meetings where Peltier presides with his six council

During the council sessions and

chets.
During the council sessions and public meetings, members of the gangs line the walls, taunting people who speak out, residents said.
"They point at you as if they're pointing a gun and firing," said Ronnie Bonspille, who runs an ambulance company at Kanesatake.
Another community member, who like many requested anonymity for fear of reprisals, said: "They have their little gang standing at the door and they sort of push you as you go out and then you get harassed for a few days afterwards. "You don't voke your opinion because if you do it's 'shut up,' that's all, and you get a visit the next day." Gerald Hannaberg got such a visit early last year. After his sister and nephews spoke out about the lawlessness at a public meeting, Robert Gabriel and 10 of his relatives and friends went to Hannaberg's house and theat up his nephews.

and beat up his nephews.
Hannaherg said Robert Gabriel's brother Gary flashed a pistol.
"People have given up here," said Bonspille. "They really don't care any more."
"It's an awful thing to do and I hate world for not being able to track!

"It san awful fulng to do and I hate myself for not being able to speak out, but I have children and a family," one community member said after refusing to be quoted by name. Educators and social workers in the community say the lack of law and order is part of a wider community beach the said to the said

and order is part of a wider community breakdown that is evident in numerous social problems many of which have arisen or worsened since the 1990 crisis.

The high-school dropout rate is 90 per cent. Drug use among children is rampant and teenage pregnancies have skyrocketed. From four or five teen pregnancies a year before the crisis, the number is now 32.

The effect on children of having known criminals defiantly walking the streets worries people like education director Linda Simon.

"I have a teenager and he thinks (the gangs) are cool guys." Simon said. "We're operating in a vacuum here. There are no adult role models."

els."

She added, however, one of the few optimistic notes heard in Kane-satake: "I think things are progress-ing slowly but not as fast as we would like to see."



Jerry Peitier "Cash flow problem

Grand Chief Peltier: ducks and disappears

When a fight broke out at a council When a light broke out at a council meeting early last year. Mary Jane Hannaberg recalled pleading for Grand Chief Peltier to step in: "He said. It's not me that's doing this," and got up and left." Peltier deftly roll, with the punch-

Oka crisis: chronology and cost

March 1990: Oka Golf Club votes to expand its course onto 22 hectares of land claimed by Mo-bawks and known as The Pines for its towering stand of pine hemlock and oak trees. The Oka village council agrees to support the expansion.

In protest, a small group of Mo-hawks creets a barrier on a little used dirt road travelling through the pines.

April 26: A Superior Court

judge in St. Jérôme issues an in-junction ordering the Mohawks to remove their barricade. They

refuse.
July 11: The Sureté du Québec raids the barricade using tear gas rails the barricade using tear gas. Shots are fired and Cpl. Marcel Lemay is killed. The SQ raiding party retreats and sets up four barricades blocking roads leading into Kanesatake. Mohawks respond with their own barricades. Mohawks in Kahnawake block the Mercier Bridge. The SQ erects five blockades around Kahnawake

Annawake.

Aug. 20: The army moves in with 1,400 troops to replace SQ

with 1.400 troops to replace SQ officers.

Aug. 29: Mohawks and the army begin dismaintling barricades around Kahnawake.

Sept. 26: Fifty-seven Mohawks, the last holdouts in Oka, leave the barricades, ending the 78-day standoff. They are arrested by the SQ and army. The crisis is over. Mohawk leaders and gov-

ernment officials express confi-dence. Kanesatake land claims will soon be settled.

Indian population of Kanesa-ike: 1.130.

Total costs to Quebec of the Oka crisis: \$108 million.

Total costs to the federal gov-roment; \$122 million.
Money paid by Ottawa to operate Kanesatake band council administration and services since

ministration and servi the crisis: 1990-91; \$3.8 million. 1991-92; \$5 million. 1992-93; \$5.3 million. 1993-94; \$4.8 million.

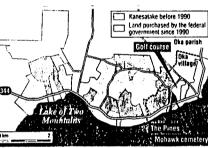
1991-95: \$5.8 million

Federal funds budgeted to purchase 188 properties from non-Indians for the Mohawks: \$25

Indians for the Mohawks: \$25 million.

Amount of land the Kanesa-take Mohawks are claiming in negotiations with the federal gov-ernment: 67,340 hectares

negonations with the federal government: 67,340 hectares stretching from Oka Park north to Mirabel airport. Money paid by Ottawa to the band council from July 1991 to July 1994 to cover band negotiating costs: \$1.5 million. Money paid by Ottawa to the band council to cover costs for 1995 negotiations: \$400,000. Total number of sessions held for land-claim negotiations since Dec. 1992; zero.



Map shows expansion of Kanesatake since Oka crisis of 1990.

es, ducks and disappears.

A solidly built man of medium height who rarely smiles, Peltier, 47, is Ojibwa from the Wikwemikong Reserve in Manitoulin Island. He moved to Oka in the 1970s after marrying a Mohawk. As an adviser to former Kanesstake grand chief Ivan Nicholas and as an administrator in the federal department of Indian and Northern Affairs, he has extensive experience in native is-

He was elected June 13, 1992. amid community expectations that his federal government connections would help settle land-claim dis-putes and bring prosperity to the

community.
"People voted for him because "People voted for him because they needed a good spokesperson, someone who had an education," said Sheila Jacobsen, a former Peltier supporter. "The community is suffering the consequences of their choice."

Facing an election this June, with council member Crawford Gabriel running against him, Peltier is targeted as the man responsible for turning the community into Dodge

turning the community into Dodge City.

Using the Oka crisis as a spring-board, Peltier has built himself a strong national profile as an outspoken, unyielding guardian of the sweerign interests of Kanesatake. He defity plays to government fears of more upheaval unless Mohawk demands are met.

iands are met. But many Mohawks say his blus-But many knows is an isotometering cuts very little ice at home.
They view him as a media-wise politician who stages crises whenever he wants money or concessions from the federal or provincial governments.

roin the section of the staged last year's illegal cemeters, Residents believe that's why he staged last year's illegal cemeters expansion over a public road. And that's why few people turned out to

Nor did they blink an eye when the SQ charged four of Peltier's supporters with mischief and property damage in the cemetery affair. Those charged included Robert Gabriel and his brother Bradley, an illusticities the feet to the feet of the second support of the s

Gabriel and his brother Bradley, an illegal eigarette trafficker. The cases are pending.

But the escapade appears to have won Petiter more money from the federal government to pay for land-claim negotiations, natives said, The community is seeking 67,340 hectares of land stretching north to Migrable A street.

Mirabel Airport.
Since 1991. Ottawa has given the band \$1.9 million to pay for lawyers, research and his negotiating team, which includes Robert Gabriel.

Of this amount, the band received

which includes Robert Cabriel.

Of this amount, the band received a lump sum of \$640,000 in 1993-94 even though land-claim negotiations had broken off in December 1992 and still haven't reopened.

Neither the general public nor the community has ever seen an accounting for these funds, which is a major sore point among residents. Earlier this month the government agreed to pay the band another \$100,000 for 1995 negotiations.

Nor has Pelitier released to the community an accounting of the \$25 million the federal government has granted the band council since 1990 to administer its economic, education and health programs.

The Department of Indian Affairs refused to comment on hand council finances. Department of Gricial Claude Michaud Sandaray comment about Kanesstake would have to room feel behand council

Claude Michaud said any comment about Kanesatake would have to come from the band council.

Secrecy is so tight, however, that even some council chiefs complain they aren't told the full story concerning band finances.

Leaked financial statements show that in 1993 Pellier's conneil had a deficie of between \$578,640 and \$700,000 on total annual budget of \$5.7 million to be \$neet on education. \$5.7 million to be spent on education, health and social services, recreation and bandadministration. At Ottawa's urging, the band bired a consultant to tighten up spending and accounting practices.

"We're not in deficit." Petiter in-

sisted at a recent court hearing in which he is suing two Mohawks for libel. "We were running into cash flow problems... What I need is five times what is being given to us by the federal government."



Mary Cree Nicholas Local iron lady

The Nicholas clan: running city hall

When the demands of leadership When the demands of leadership overwhelm Jerry Peltier, he susy he seeks solace in Muriel Nicholas. The matriarch of the Nicholas clan, Muriel proffers tea and advice, en-couraging him to stay on as grand chief. And why not? The Nicholas family has benefited greatly during Peltier's administration. Peltier's administration

Peltier's administration.
Ask almost anybody in Kanesatake who runs city half and you'll get
one answer: the Nicholases.
Stop in at the band office and the
first person you'll likely meet is Linda Nicholas, a soft-spoken woman
whose son, Kirk Lessard, was one of
the "critter," who went after Structhe "critters" who went after Serge

Simon.

Linda is the cousin of Mary Cree Nicholas who, as director of opera-tions for the band council, is widely regarded as the backbone of Pelti-

regarded as the backbone of Pelli-er's government. Muriel is Mary Cree's aunt. Age 37, Mary Cree's dyed reddish-blond hair, heavy makeup and pref-erence for flashy clothes and spanerence for flashy clothes and span-dex makes her a standout in Mo-hawk society. Behind her slight build and pancake mask are a sharp tongue and domineering attitude. She's the local iron lady, the supre-mo of a miniature bureaucracy where jobs tend to slide into the hands of relatives and supporters. A glance at the list of band coun-cil department heads is like reading the Nicholas family tree.

cil department heads is like reading the Nicholas family tree.

Mary Cree's brother, Eugene Nicholas, is deputy minister of jus-tice reporting to Robert Gabriel.

Her brother Hugh is in charge of protecting and maintaining homes the government has purchased for the Mohawks.

the Mohawks.
Her sister Jocelyn is director of drug and alcohol prevention.
Her cousin Wendy Nicholas is the director of welfare; her cousin Mary Simon is director of economic development; her cousin Carolyn Dussault is director of the labor management board; and her cousin Patty is director of medical transport.
At least 26 Nicholases or close relatives hold down jobs controlled disparisos hold down jobs controlled the

atives hold down jobs controlled directly or indirectly by the band council. There are about 82 such jobs

This is not government by the "This is not government by the people, it's government by the Nicholases," Ronnie Bonspille said. Mary Cree and her brothers Ivan and Hugh Nicholas also operate the largest business in Kanesatake: the illegal Bingo Magic.

Mary Cree refused to be inter-weed for this article. She said she wasn't "going to speak to no white man."

A frontier outpost: SQ's shaky liaison

Along Highway 344 leading into the village of Oka, a small, clap-board farmhouse sits about 50 yards back from the road. It's a satellite Sûretê du Québec command post where Cpl. Daniel Beaudry works on native criminal files and acts as

the ligison officer between the SO

the liaison officer between the SQ and the community. If a Mohavk has a policing problem, he's supposed to contact Beaudry. Beaudry works in the vise grips of varied interests, and sometimes the squeeze is unnerving. His bosses at the SQ fear too much meddling will spark another Oka crisis. Yet they still expect him and his colleagues to maintain law and order. So Beaudry, must tread, but he must tread lightly.

ly.
What's more, Beaudry has to dealwith Peltier and Robert Gabriel.
They want him transferred and have
made that a condition for returning
to the land-claims bargaining table

with the federal government.

Peltier said he has told Michel,
Robert, federal land-claims negoritator, to have Beaudry replaced by
the former SQ liaison office?

the former SO liaison officer. Robert Gagnon.

The SQ removed Gagnon last June after the police failed to help. Serge Simon. Simon recalls begging Gagnon to send somebody, "but help just stalled and stalled."

In a brief interview, Peltier was asked why he wants Gagnon back.

"It's because they don't have a liaison officer at the moment," he said.

said.
But isn't Beaudry the liaison office

cer?"
"Yes, but we don't recognize him
He's been identified as a person the
community does not feel comforte
able with. He's arrogant and is feed
ing misinformation."
Peltier said he also wants the liais
son officer to report directly to Public Security Minister Serge Ménard
or to the chief of the SQ. At the moment, Beaudy reports to his stalium ment, Beaudry reports to his station chief in St. Eustache. Peltier said he doesn't trust the St. Eustache de

But many people in the community interviewed by *The Gazette* sup-

ry interviewed by The Gazeta' sup-port Beaudry.

"Gagnon is on their (Peltier's) side," Serge Simon said. "Why would somebody want a cop in pare ticular if he wasn't on your side?"

Beaudry met with several of the critters last year and persuaded them to turn themselves in for varigues on the several part of the several part o Beaudry met with several of the

nny friend Jason?"
They chuckled and nervously look
away. Beaudry smiled and said: "If
you see him tell him to come in and
visit. Tell him I just want to talk to
him." my friend Jason?

Jason is Jason Gabriel, one of the critters who harassed Serge Simon. Gabriel was sentenced last year to two years in jail for conspiracy to de-stroy property and for assault with a weapon in connection with a roba weapon in connection with a rob-bery attempt in Kanesatake. After Christmas, federal prison officials released him to a halfway house in Montreal. Soon afterwards, he es-caped to Kanesatake, where he's

seen daily.

According to the protocol, Beaudry is supposed to communicate with Robert Gabriel, Peltier's cate with Robert Gabriel, Pettier's minister of justice. Jason is Robert's brother. When Jason is caught, he'll be sent back to prison to serve out his two years. But Robert won't turn in his brother. Meanwhile, the residents of Kanesatake have to live with an es-caped criminal whose brother is in charge of justice.

charge of justice.

Many Mohawks believe the SQ's refuctance to police Kanesatake is

If it's Mohawks doing it to Mohawks, they don't care," one resi-

dent said.

Beaudry denies this, but he won't talk about his files or the problems at Kanesatake. When it's suggested to Beaudry that the community seems to have quieted down since the fall, he smiles and says something about it being winter. Then he

says:
"Just wait until the spring. There's an election coming up, you know."