

## Another Charlatan Exposed: Eugene Strong and the McKees Rocks Mounds

By Jacqueline S. Homan, author of [Classism For Dimwits](#) and [Divine Right](#)



Eugene Strong , Detroit Canoe Crossing and pow-wow on August 19<sup>th</sup> 2011

There have always been charlatans claiming to be someone they're not — from Anna Anderson, the pretender who claimed to be the Grand Duchess Anastasia, youngest daughter of Czar Nicholas whose entire family was shot by the Red Army contingent in the Ural Mountains hamlet of Yekaterinburg during the October Revolution in 1917 Russia, to all of the phonies claiming to be taught by Native American medicine men and spiritual leaders like James A. Ray, the self-proclaimed New Age guru who charged thousands of dollars for a sweat lodge ceremony that resulted in three deaths.

While some of these frauds do what they do for financial gain, others do it for status. One such charlatan is 60 year-old Eugene Strong of Clinton, Pennsylvania, a tiny hamlet nestled in the hills of Allegheny County in the Appalachian region of Western Pennsylvania near Pittsburgh.

Eugene Strong will tell anyone with an ear that he is the grandson of a Potawatomi man born on a Michigan reservation and that he speaks for his

Potawatomi ancestors in his fight to secure the McKees Rocks burial mounds. With his freckled face and arms, piercing blue eyes and long reddish-gray hair, he looks more like a burned out, washed up old hippie who got wasted away again in Margaritaville.

Strong adamantly insists that he was spiritually appointed to protect an ancient Algonquin burial mound in McKees Rocks. He is the director of the non-profit organization he founded, the Mounds Society of Western Pennsylvania, which he incorporated in 2006 with help from the legal clinic at the Duquesne

University School of Law. The executive board of his group includes a well-heeled journalist, Cecelia Clarke, and Reverend Mark Gruber, a former anthropology professor from St. Vincent College. Clarke and Gruber compiled a 67-page book titled *McKees Rocks Mounds Rising*, with pending copyright, that they're claiming is accurate. Except there's a problem — theirs is a revisionist history. When Strong was confronted with that fact, he and his organization refused to retract their revisionist claims asserted in their book. There is a lot at stake regarding the McKees Rocks mounds, which is the largest ancient Native American burial mound in the US.

In an [August 2010 Post-Gazette article](#), Strong claims his altruistic intent concerning the mounds, saying that he only seeks to “honor the ancestors” of the Native American community that once flourished there, and to preserve Algonquin cultural heritage. Strong's protest march outside the Carnegie Museum of Natural History catapulted him into the media spotlight when he demanded the repatriation of the ancient aboriginal skeletal remains that were unearthed in an excavation of the McKees Rocks mounds in 1896. Regional archeologist Mark Conaughy with the State Museum Commission said “it certainly is of significance” and posited that the mound was used as a burial site for important people in the Adena society, as well as for later burials for the Hopewell and Monongahela tribes. [The Monongahela were part of the Erie confederacy, a maize culture just like the Iroquois and eventually they became part of the Iroquois.]

But there are two problems. One is in the misleading classification of Native sacred sites, which serves to prevent the descendants' tribes from making a repatriation claim (addressed further on in this article) and the second is that Eugene Strong is deliberately going about repatriation attempts all wrong — despite having been previously told several times what the proper channels and protocols are, with the full blessing and backing of those on the executive board of his non-profit group, including Cecelia Clarke and Mark Gruber who compiled the revisionist history in *McKees Rocks Mounds Rising*. The reason he stubbornly persists is because he wants to buy the mounds, and he has stated so.

US federal law specifies museums must work with tribal governments, not individuals, on repatriation issues. Dr. Sherry Hutt, national program manager for the Native American Graves Protection & Repatriation Act says that “unclaimed items” not tied to a specific tribe, or confederacy of tribes, are available an online database to tribes that might want to make a claim for funerary objects and human remains. If a museum determines that a tribe requesting these things is indeed “culturally affiliated”, then the museum will cooperate with the transfer of ownership.

Carnegie Museum spokeswoman, Leigh Kish, says that Eugene Strong was told he is going about the repatriation attempts all wrong: “For the museum to be in compliance with federal regulations, we have to have a formal written request from a tribe recognized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs before we can even begin to review it.”

Initiating valid repatriation claims are difficult enough as it is for tribes meeting all of those requirements who have ancestral ties to ancient remains and sacred sites. Pretenders only worsen the situation.

Strong, who claims Potawatomi heritage and who claims to know Native history saying that he is guided by Mediwin and Potawatomi medicine men and spirituality teachers and elders, told Anya Sostek of the

*Post-Gazette* last year that he had only recently learned about the proper procedure for making a repatriation request and that he is working with the Potawatomi tribe at the Gun Lake reserve in Michigan to procure repatriation.

The Iroquois, particularly the Seneca originally from that region, would be the ones to contact regarding matters of stewardship of the McKees Rocks mounds, and they are not inclined towards buying the mounds because you cannot buy or sell sacred.

The McKees Rocks mounds would unquestionably be in safekeeping in Iroquois hands, and if Eugene Strong was truly part Native American and truly plugged into his Potawatomi heritage and teachings as he claims he is, then he would know all this and the last thing he'd be doing is running to AIM pow-wows, wearing his "traditions" on his sleeve like a fashion accessory, in an attempt to get publicity backing from AIM as well as the benefit of AIM's notoriously militant muscle to support his agenda.

And what precisely is Eugene Strong's agenda? He insists it is to protect the McKees Rocks mound. But if that were true, why would he rudely tell Nikki Maracle — a well-respected Bear Clan Mohawk from Akwesasne, and a traditional Longhouse — that he refuses to step aside and let the proper people (Iroquois) look after these issues? Is *that* how one protects a sacred site and honors the ancestors?

The Seneca that once lived in that region had to be relocated to Salamanca, New York after their reserve in western Pennsylvania was flooded and taken by eminent domain for the construction of the Kinzua Dam. They are the closest "culturally affiliated" and federally recognized tribe that would be the ones connected with the McKees Rocks Mounds. The Seneca are Iroquoian.

If Strong is genuinely following a path of Native tradition as he claims to be, why would he stubbornly insist that the McKees Rocks mounds are Algonquin mounds even after being told by several credible people that those mounds are Iroquoian? If the objective is to protect them, why do this?

Strong, with the help of his cohorts Cecelia Clarke and Mark Gruber, is peddling a false history that cites the mounds as Algonquin. The mounds are described in his book as being 5,000 years old with a tumulus (the top part of the mound) that was constructed "by Adena people who first settled the Ohio Valley around 1000 BC" — approximately 3,000 years ago. The book's forward states that archeologists, including Richard Lang of the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, agree that a village adjacent to the mounds was flourishing by 3000 BC. That date, according to the book's authors, was based on the recovery of stone tools and vessel fragments that were "made by people of the Archaic, or pre-ceramic era."

The first red flag is in the book's foreword by a member of Strong's motley crew, Mark Gruber, the [kiddie porn-indulging priest and fired professor turned Native rights activist](#). Gruber refers to the mound builders as "Adena people." Maybe if he had used that college computer for actual Native American research instead of satisfying his penchant for pedophilia he might have learned something.

The use of names "Hopewell", "Point Peninsula", "Meadowood", "Adena" and other archeological designations are often used to conceal the true identity of ancient burial mound builders because the

archeology community decided over a hundred years ago not to denote tribal affiliations of mound builders in their reports. This practice, among others, allowed universities and museums to skirt the Native American Graves Protection Act that only protects burial sites of “known tribes.”

Because of this loophole, countless human skeletal remains and ancient funerary items remain in boxes — literally held hostage by universities, which are not going to divest their shelves and storage facilities of these items and admit that they had thousands of Sioux or Iroquois skeletons in their closets along with sacred funerary objects in their possession. As long as mounds are designated “Adena” (or “Hopewell”, etc,) they will continue to dig, justifying doing so in the name of “scholarly research.” The idea that invasive activities might be offensive to aboriginal communities that were nearly wiped out by genocide in the name of Manifest Destiny floated right over the heads of those who serve on the Mound Society’s board; those who compiled this book which Eugene Strong holds as a gospel truth. This book calls for further archeological digging and research at the McKees Rocks mound. Amazingly, invasive archeological and anthropological “research” activities fail to bother the “traditional” Potawatomi that Strong claims to be.

According to Fritz Zimmerman, author of *A Photographical Essay and Guide to the Adena, Hopewell, Sioux and Iroquois Mounds and Earthworks*, the word “Sioux” was an Algonquin word meaning “snakes” — which some say is a derogatory word for Iroquoian people (like the Erie Neutrals).

But whether the word “Sioux” is derogatory or not is questionable because Iroquois people have a tradition, a set of teachings known as “snake medicine”, which made them very special because many other Native American tribes feared snakes whereas the Iroquois learned a lot by observing them. So the snake medicine of Iroquois people is, unsurprisingly, included in the expressions of some of their sacred sites and burial mounds — the Snake Mound in Toronto’s High Park and the Serpent Mound in Ohio are two examples. [The Serpent Mounds in Ohio were built by the ancestors of the Erie Neutrals.]

Zimmerman also notes that linguists have made a connection between the Sioux, Cherokee, and Iroquois languages. All three of these nations’ oral histories also say they are from the northeast through the mid-Atlantic regions. Tool kits and burial practices were very similar between the early Sioux and Iroquois. Richard Maracle, a Bear Clan Mohawk chief, once said that at one time “the Longhouse was everywhere” — meaning that the roof was the sky, the floor was the earth, the eastern doorway was the Atlantic Ocean and the western doorway was the Pacific.

The Cherokee, Sioux, and Iroquoian languages are all part of the Hokan-Siouan linguistic family, which included the peoples living in most of Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, the mid-Atlantic states, and part of Ontario, Canada. Many of the nations that are part of this same Hokan-Siouan linguistic family have also participated in burial mound building at one time or another in their history. And that includes the Monongahela, who populated southwestern Pennsylvania and who were absorbed by the Iroquois, their sister society, long before the first Europeans met the first Haudenosaunee.

The Monongahela region in western Pennsylvania was known by George Washington and several others to be inhabited by Seneca and Seneca/Mingo people, which included Queen Aliquippa, her father and her husband. Strong’s book lists her as a Lenape Clan mother and leader. The Lenape, Delaware, and

Shawnee were Algonquin. They didn't have clan mothers and they didn't have burial mounds. This establishes that the McKees Rocks mounds were built by Iroquoians — not the Algonquins, who were always known to be nomadic. Oh my, what a tangled web we weave when at first we practice to deceive!

The linguistic family analysis, which is supported by oral traditions of many nations, buttressed by the journal entries of George Washington and other British colonial militia men, all points to the nations of the Hokan-Siouan language family as being the very same nations who were the ancient mound builders. This entirely leaves out those nations of the Algonquin language family as mound builders — Algonquin nations such as the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Odawa, Delaware, and Lenape (whom Eugene Strong insists Queen Aliquippa is from).

The second red flag is in the final paragraph of the foreword in *McKees Rocks Mounds Rising* which says that one of the goals and objectives of Eugene Strong's Mound Society is to "present the mounds as worthy of 21<sup>st</sup> century archeological investigation."

Given the not-so-great track record of the archeology industry, it is very hard to believe that someone claiming to be very committed to Potawatomi traditions, beliefs, and practices would be eager for further invasion by archeologists concerning this very special burial site. The archeology profession, like the anthropology profession, has given itself more than one black eye in its dealings with a threatened aboriginal culture — a culture that a remnant of North American indigenous holocaust survivors are struggling to retain in the face of racially motivated hatred centered on notions of racial inferiority.

So what motivates Eugene Strong to cling to a revisionist history of the McKees Rocks Mounds where his ultimate goal is to buy the mounds from the borough and the oil company that owns it?

The answer lies in examining the common personality traits of pretenders like Anna Anderson, James A. Ray, and all of the board members with undesirable backgrounds serving on the Mound Society of Western Pennsylvania who arrogantly insist that the Iroquois don't know their own history. If Eugene Strong were given an Indian name, a fitting one might be Otah Oswegai:yo — a bird so full of crap it that it cannot fly.

<http://taiiakon.wordpress.com/mckees-rock-mound-ancestral-to-iroquoian-people/>