

FIRST ENCOUNTER, 1786

Across this time chasm
wider than the great Niagara
I see you staring.
A band of whites
toils past you on your lakeside trail
that necklace of ruts and bumps
like a beaded cord lining the Ontario
your “lake of shining waters”.

These are my people
loyal to the British King
as your people were
and displaced by the new United States
as your ancestors were by the French.

They're weary, my grandparents five-times-great-
from five hundred miles on foot since New Jersey
from five hundred miles keeping six children safe.

You're wary, I imagine
from warring for the King
from treaties and terms
unfamiliar to your culture.

Maybe they quicken their steps
eerily aware of your presence in the trees.
Maybe you wonder what further
displacement they bring.
Or maybe you count the children,
same number as yours.

Across this time chasm
wider than the great Niagara
I imagine you counting and I say to you,
“Meegwich / thank you.
I hope my people were kind.”