

# Indian Defense League of America: Free Border Crossing

The right to cross the border is of utmost important to indigenous people, as it has created an arbitrary divide, often splitting up nations, restricting cultural practices and erasing native sovereignty. The Free Border Crossing is an act of resistance against these restrictions and a celebration of culture. The parade begins at 11:30 on the third Saturday of July. When the parade goes into the United States it is called a ‘celebration’ as the U.S. honors the Jay Treaty. When the parade crosses into Canada it is called a ‘commemoration’ because the Ottawa government does not consider itself bound by a treaty made between the U.S. and Britain in its colonial era. and therefore does not respect the Jay Treaty.

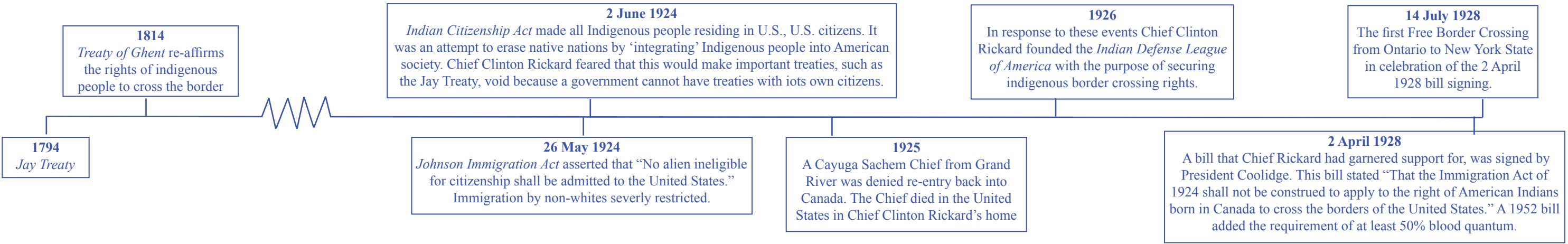
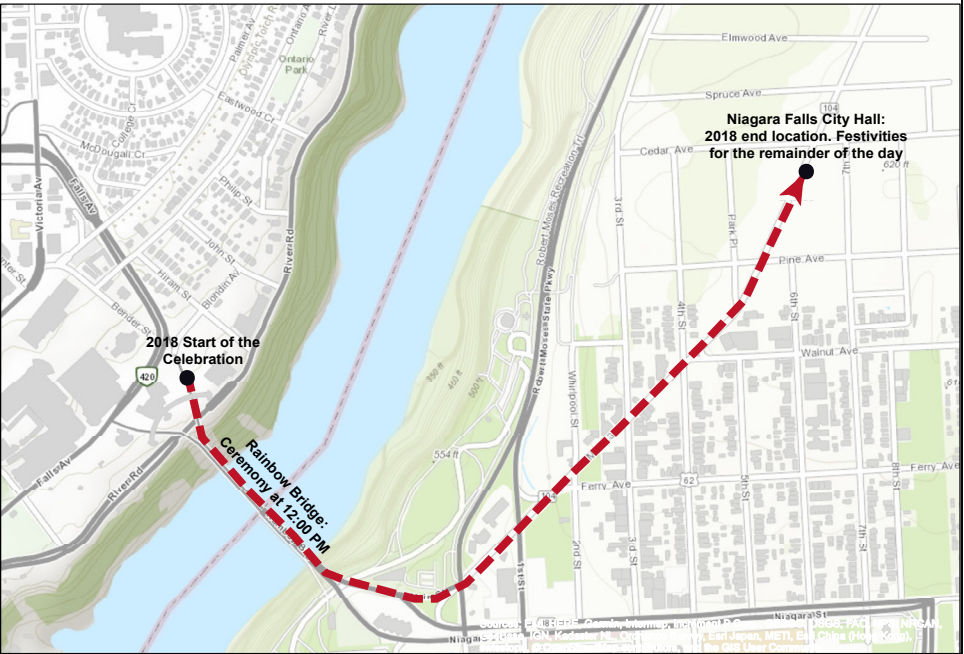
Acts of resistance against colonial powers work within spaces of dominance, i.e. the border, while also working to create new geographies. This event creates new meanings for the space of the border, resists colonial powers, and asserts both the right to cross the border and Indian nation sovereignty. It is a forum to allow voices to be heard and culture to be celebrated.

## The Jay Treaty of 1794

*“It is agreed that it shall at all Times be free to His Majesty’s Subjects, and to the Citizens of the United States, and also to the Indians dwelling on either side of the said Boundary Line freely to pass and repass by Land, or Inland Navigation, into the respective Territories and Countries of the Two Parties on the Continent of America (the Country within the Limits of the Hudson’s Bay Company only excepted) and to navigate all the Lakes, Rivers, and waters thereof, and freely to carry on trade and commerce with each other.”*

This treaty ensures the right of indigenous people to cross the border, however it leaves the power to define *who* has the right and *how* they can cross in the hands of the Canadian and United States government. This can be seen throughout the history of the Free Border Crossing event.

## 2018 Free Border Crossing Celebration Parade



## Chief Clinton Rickard

**“I did not consider there was any such thing as ‘Canadian Indian’ or ‘United States Indian.’ All Indians are one people. We were here long before there was any border to make an artificial division of our people.”**

**- From *Fighting Tuscarora*, p. 72**



## Sources:

Rickard, C., & Graymont, B. (1984). *Fighting Tuscarora: The autobiography of Chief Clinton Rickard*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Bruyneel, K. (2004). Challenging American Boundaries: Indigenous People and the “Gift” of U.S. Citizenship. *Studies in American Political Development*, 18(01). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898588X04000021>

Activist Roots still Thrive in Canada Border Crossing. (2004, July 29). Retrieved from <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/activist-roots-still-thrive-in-canada-border-crossing/>

**Photos:** (Left to Right) Niagara Falls Ontario Public Library, and the Indian Defense League of America Facebook, Carrie Lester.

If any information is incorrect or if you have any suggestions to additions, please contact the Border Rites project via the website: [www.border-rites.org](http://www.border-rites.org)