

## **Covered With Night, by Nicole Eustace**

*Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy*

Nicole Eustace was awarded the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in History for her elegantly written book, *Covered with Night*. A 1990 graduate of Somers High School, Dr. Eustace currently is Professor of History at New York University. *Covered with Night* – subtitled “A Story of Murder and Indigenous Justice in Early America” – brings to light a little-known 1722 incident which has long-lasting ramifications.

American colonists “thought the world could be neatly divided into savage peoples and civilized ones.” They did not imagine that Native Americans could have a superior system of justice. As English settlers expanded their communities in colonial America, they had hoped to coexist peacefully with the Indigenous people.

That fragile peace, however, was upended in March 1722 when a Native hunter was killed by two white fur traders in the Susquehanna River Valley. Many feared that the murder could trigger a full-scale war. Sawantaeny, the dead hunter, was a well regarded member of the Iroquois—then part of the formidable Five Nations of Haudenosaunee.

After a drunken night of bargaining over fur pelts, the traders – brothers John and Edmund Cartlidge – assaulted Sawantaeny near a campfire and left him for dead. The hunter’s wife stayed by her dying husband’s side, hearing his last words: “My friends have killed me.”

As news about the killing spread, the Native community mourned the slayed hunter, expressing their grief as “covered with night and wrapped in darkness.” Meanwhile, Pennsylvania Governor William Keith was concerned that the killing would lead to a Native uprising. But Governor Keith and other influential colonists failed to understand that Native people wanted meaningful restitution and reconciliation rather than retribution.

While the Cartlidge brothers languished in a cramped Philadelphia prison, Governor Keith traveled to Albany for a meeting with leaders of the Five Nations. In addition to settling land boundaries, the conference addressed the matter of Sawantaeny’s murder. Governor Keith, proposing a firm alliance, presented two wampum belts to the Native leaders, one for “strength” and the other for “true heart.” To the relief of many, the speaker for the Five Nations then graciously told the assembly that “We are all in Peace.” Instead of threatening war, Native people stipulated that the Cartlidge brothers must be released as a condition of the treaty.

“Kept for centuries as the record of property transfer,” Dr. Eustace concludes, *The Great Treaty of 1722*, as it came to be called, also commemorates Indigenous principles of restorative justice. Here is a part of our national heritage ripe for reclamation. After centuries covered with night, we may yet hope for a new dawn.”

(Note: *Covered with Night* is part of the Heritage Hills Library and Somers Library collections. For a list of new books at the Heritage Hills Library, please see page 11.)