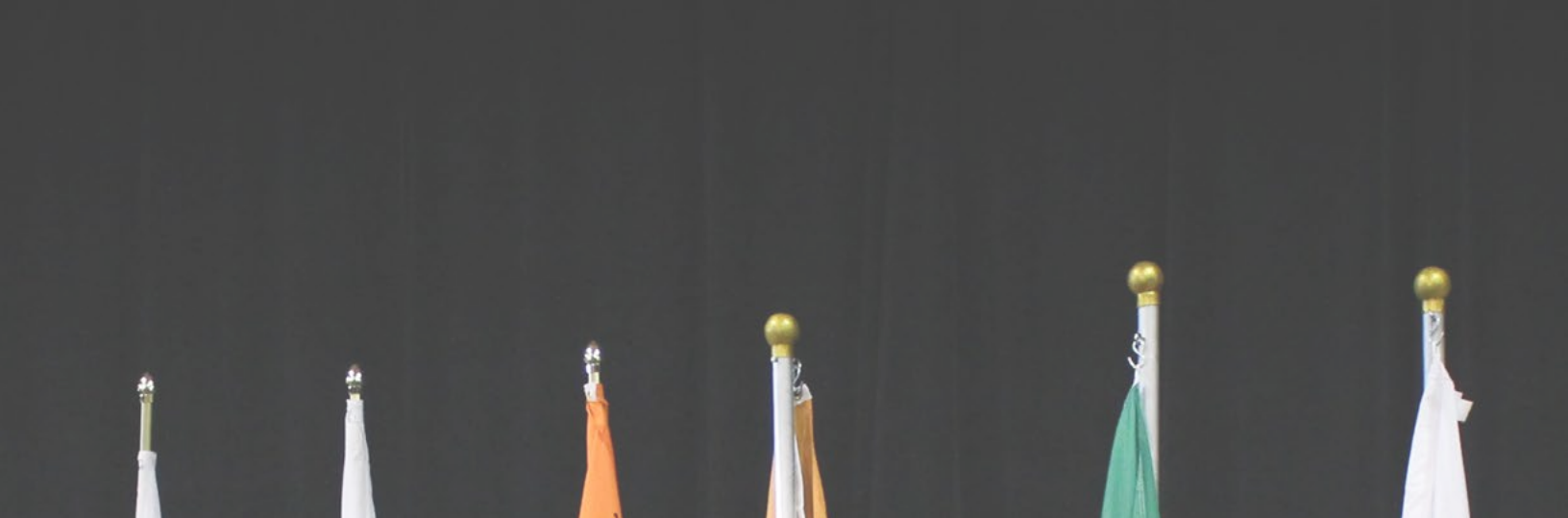




WAMPUM BELTS

OF THE MISSISSAUGAS OF THE CREDIT FIRST NATION



by Darin P. Wybenga



Published by Pillar 5

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Wampum Comes to the Anishinaabek*¹

Maudjeekawiss the son of a manitou and a human woman, was a mighty warrior who had ranged all about Turtle Island looking out for enemies that might attack the Anishinaabe. He had travelled to the east, to the west, and to the south, but had never made his way to the north. He set off on a journey to see the land and the people the land of that region.

He walked on and on until one day he happened to come upon a meeting on the leaders of the Bear Nation. Hidden in the bushes, he listened to the proceedings and noticed that as each leader spoke he referred to a sash, covered with symbols, draped over his left arm.

Maudjeekawiss emerged from the bushes when the meeting had concluded and asked permission of the Bear leaders to visit their lands. While awaiting their answer, he asked the principal men of the community the purpose of the sashes used during the meeting. He was informed that the symbols on the sashes reminded the speakers of the history of their people and everything of importance to them.

Impressed by what he had learned, Maudjeekawiss snatched up a belt and attempted to make off with it. Chased by the warriors of the Bear Nation, he turned to defend himself and killed one of his pursuers. Just as he was about to be killed by the remaining warriors, the elders of the community proposed he be adopted into the community in order to replace the warrior he had killed. Maudjeekawiss was reluctantly adopted and he prospered among the Bear Nation so much so that they desired to make him their chief. Before accepting the role, he decided to consult with his people back home.

Arriving among his own people, he showed the people a sash with its many symbols. He wished his people to adopt the sash and its use for recording the history of the people. The Anishinaabek did as asked and the leaders of the people began to recite their history as recorded on the sashes that came to be known as wampum belts.

*The Mississaugas are a sub-group of the Anishinaabe (Ojibway) people.

¹ This story is adapted from Basil Johnson's, *Ojibway Heritage*, Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1976

Introduction

Although primarily associated with the First Nations peoples of the Great Lakes region, and in particular the Haudenosaunee (the Iroquois), the origins of wampum are found on the eastern seaboard of North America. Using the whelk shell, the Indigenous people of the area manufactured small white beads that could be used for decorative, ceremonial, diplomatic, or trade purposes. Making the beads was a time intensive and highly skilled process that involved breaking the shell into pieces, drilling holes through pieces of appropriate thickness, and finally grinding the pieces into a tubular shape. Upon the arrival of Europeans, metal awls made the manufacture of wampum beads easier and allowed makers to craft purple/ black beads from the relatively harder quahog shell. European tools also allowed for standardization in the size of the beads with the average bead 5.5 mm in length with a 4 mm diameter. The word wampum is derived from the Algonquian word “wampumpeague” which initially referred only to the white beads but now refers to beads of either colour. White wampum often symbolized peace and life, purity, and prosperity while the darker beads often held more negative connotations. A wampum belt painted red was a sign of war.

Because of their relative scarcity and the various uses to which they could be applied, wampum was of great value to First Nations people. Trading relationships between First Nations saw the movement of the beads from the east coast, down the Hudson River and into the Great Lakes region. Used for personal adornments, or to mark important occasions such as births, marriages, or burials, perhaps the most important use of wampum was in the realm of diplomacy. Diplomacy among First Nations, and later between First Nations and Non-Indigenous peoples, would have ground to a halt without the use of wampum. Speakers, and the messages they brought, were authenticated by strings of wampum and wampum belts. The wampum was seen as attesting to the credibility and qualifications of the speaker as well as the sincerity of the words spoken. When making a point during an oration, a string or belt of wampum would be picked up by a speaker to represent the point being made as trustworthy and genuine. Treaty negotiation held on August 1, 1805, between the Mississaugas and the Crown illustrate the use of wampum to denote the standing of the speaker as well as the sincerity of his message. During the negotiations for what is known as the “Head of the Lake Treaty”, Chief Quinipeno acting as spokesman on behalf of the Mississaugas explains

their reluctance to part with part with more land. As taken from the minutes of the meeting:

Quinipeno spoke as follows on ten strings of White wampum.

Father I hope you will open your ears and attend to what, we have to say...

Quinipeno then proceeded to recite a long list of grievances the Mississaugas held against the Crown for promises unfulfilled from earlier treaties. In earlier treaties negotiated by the Mississaugas, they had expected to share their lands with the settlers, but instead the incoming tide of newcomers strained the resources of the land leading to the collapse of their traditional economy. Instead of helping the Mississaugas, the settlers drove the Mississaugas from their camping sites and even threatened to shoot them. Even a blacksmith previously promised to complete work for Mississaugas had been unfulfilled. Noting the impoverishment of his people, Quinipeno emphasized the opposition of the young men and women to the acquisition of more of their lands by the Crown. Despite their litany of complaints, the white wampum accompanying Quinipeno signified that the Mississaugas were approaching the Crown negotiator, William Clause, in a spirit of goodwill. In fact, the Mississaugas would complete treaty negotiations with the Crown the very next day for roughly 71,000 acres of land. The wampum also signified that Quinipeno was authorized to speak on behalf of the Credit River people and that the words he articulated were genuine.

When Europeans arrived in North America, they quickly realized the importance wampum played in the lives of its inhabitants and incorporated its use into the trade and diplomatic relationships established with the First Nations. Whether seeking trade deals, alliances, or land, Europeans and EuroAmericans recognized the use of wampum was essential for successful negotiations with First Nations. Within the United States, the use of wampum was largely discontinued in favour of written documents by 1800, while the practice continued in Canada for slightly longer. Wampum was employed by Mississaugas of the Credit ancestors in their diplomatic relations with the British Crown as late as 1838.

Kahkewaquonaby (Rev. Peter Jones), Chief of the Mississaugas of the Credit, met with Queen Victoria in 1838, at Windsor Castle, to present a petition on behalf of his people requesting title deeds to their lands at the Credit River. Attesting to both the sincerity of the petition and the messenger, a string of

wampum accompanied the document. Jones wrote in his diary:

[14 September 1838]

I then said that I had great pleasure in laying before Her Majesty a petition from the Indians residing at the River Credit in Upper Canada, which that people had sent by me; that I was happy to say Lord Glenelg (pointing to his Lordship,) had already granted the prayer of the petition, by requesting the Governor of Upper Canada, to give the Indians the title-deeds they asked for. His Lordship bowed to Her Majesty, and she bowed in token of approbation of His Lordship's having granted the thing prayed for by her red children; that I presented the petition to Her Majesty, thinking she would like to possess such a document as a curiosity, as the wampum attached to it had a meaning, and their totams marked opposite the names of the Indians who signed it. The Queen then said, "I thank you, sir, I am much obliged to you." I then proceeded to give her the meaning of the wampum; and told her that the white wampum signified the loyal and good feeling which prevails amongst the Indians towards Her Majesty and Her Government; but that the black wampum was designed to tell Her Majesty that their hearts were troubled on account of their having no title deeds for their lands; and that they had sent their petition and wampum that Her Majesty might be pleased to take out all the black wampum, so that the string might all be white.

While the petition of the Mississaugas of the Credit was seemingly successful, the black wampum beads would remain on the string as colonial officials in Upper Canada never did grant the First Nation title deeds for its holdings at the River Credit.

Wampum belts were produced as historical records of agreements and occasions past that were important to First Nations. Wampum belts with symbols woven into them would serve as a mnemonic device (memory aid) helping all parties remember the substance of an agreement or an event of the past. Likewise, the wampum belts in the Mississauga of the Credit Collection help the First Nation to remember important happenings that have shaped, and continue to shape, the lives of its people to this very day.

A large part of what the First Nation is today is built upon agreements reached with other First Nations or with the British Crown — many of those agreements are memorialized within the wampum belts of the collection.

Wampum strings presented by
the Mississaugas of the Credit to
Lord Durham on his appointment
to Governor General of British
North America. [ca. 1838]

(photo courtesy of Library and Archives Canada)



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1764 Treaty of Niagara Belt

Three of the wampum belts in the Mississaugas of the Credit Collection have their origins at a meeting held, in 1764, at Fort Niagara. Those gathered for the meeting consisted of representatives from twenty four First Nations and Sir William Johnson, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, representing the British Crown. Representatives of the Mississaugas gathered with members of the Haudenosaunee, Wyandot, Menominee, Algonquin, Nipissing and Ojibway Nations, amongst others, at a meeting that would determine Crown/First Nations relationships down to the present day. The purpose of the meeting was twofold: the ratification of the terms of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, and the reestablishment of good will among the First Nations of the Great Lakes region and the British Crown.



The event came at an auspicious time as the previous year had been a trying time for the British in North America. Pontiac, an Odawa chief, the primary leader of a loose coalition of Ojibway, Odawa, Pottawatomie, and Wendat Petun people, led an attempt to drive the British from the Upper Great Lakes. The First Nations had greatly preferred their previous relationship with the French who had “controlled” the Upper Lakes prior to their defeat by the British in the Seven Years War (1756-1763). In their relationship with the First Nations, the French had been respectful of Indigenous customs, had learned the languages of the people with whom they had traded, and in some cases, had even intermarried with them. The French, while having an appetite for furs, had no desire for First Nations’ lands apart from a few sites required for trading posts or mission churches. They recognized the sovereignty of First Nations people by providing presents in exchange for passing through their lands. In contrast, the British colonies along the eastern seaboard of North America, had an

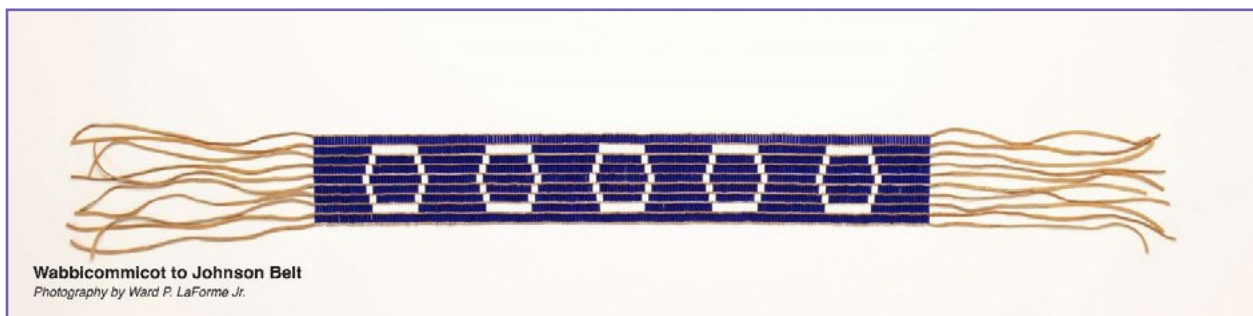
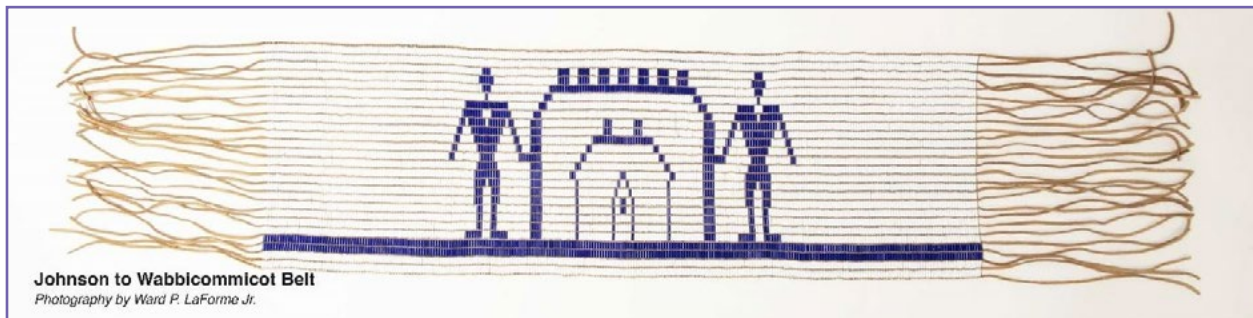
insatiable hunger for First Nations' land on which to settle their rapidly growing populations. Encroachment on First Nations' lands, as the burgeoning settler population moved westward, greatly alarmed the tribes. Also troublesome for the First Nations, the British had not supplied the presents the western tribes had grown accustomed to receiving from the French traders. Failure to provide presents of powder and shot meant that many First Nation hunters struggled to obtain an adequate amount of food for their people. Chafing under British "rule", Pontiac and his followers initiated a conflict that saw the capture of nine British forts, the death of some 2500 individuals — civilians and soldiers, and a prolonged siege of Fort Detroit.

While the Royal Proclamation of 1763 addressed a significant underlying cause of Pontiac's rebellion, it did little to sooth the anger of the First Nations that had come to expression during the uprising. Fortunately, Sir William Johnson and the First Nations' delegates were able reach an agreement wherein peace and friendship were established in the Great Lakes Region. Both parties to the agreement recognized the other as an ally coexisting together on the land. The Treaty of Niagara wampum belt, also known as the Silver Covenant Chain of Friendship Belt, memorialized the agreement by depicting two figures — one representing the English; the other representing the First Nations, holding hands to signify their relationship as friends and allies. The links of the chain woven into the belt suggest a pathway, or a road, of communication between the Crown and First Nations.

1764

Wabbicommicot to Johnson Belt; Johnson to Wabbicommicot Belt ²

During Pontiac's uprising, Chief Wabbicommicot, a Mississauga Chief of the Toronto area (Mississaugas of the Credit territory) had managed to keep the Mississaugas at the western end of Lake Ontario out of the conflict. Chief Wabbicommicot, one of twelve Ojibway leaders at the meeting at Niagara, presented to the Superintendent, a dark wampum belt with five circles of white wampum- the circles likely indicating the bands he represented. The Chief then related to Johnson how he had worked on behalf of the Crown to persuade the followers of Pontiac to lift the siege of Fort Detroit. Wabbicommicot, whom Sir William regarded as *"ye Chief Man North & West upon Lake Ontario and so far upon Lake Erie as ye big [Grand] River"* was recognized for his role in helping to end the hostilities of the previous year. Johnson thanked Wabbicommicot for his efforts and then produced a wampum belt signifying an end to hostilities and a resumption of peaceful trade with the former First Nations allied with France. The belt used purple wampum to depict *"Niagara's large house and fort with two men holding it fast on either side, and a Road through it ..."*



² As no examples of the Wabbicommicot to Johnson Belt and the Johnson to Wabbicommicot Belt are known to exist, the belts have been constructed from descriptions contained within archival documents.

1815

Pledge of the Crown Belt

Mississaugas of the Credit warriors fought as British allies during the War of 1812; two warriors in particular- Lawrence Herkimer and Joseph Sawyer, left behind a record of their involvement. Lawrence Herkimer (1787-1877) was a messenger for the Crown between York and Niagara during the conflict and participated in the Battle of Stoney Creek and the defense of York. He escorted prisoners three times down Lake Ontario. Joseph Sawyer (1786-1863), later Chief of the Mississaugas of the Credit, participated in the British victory at Detroit, and fought at the Battles of Queenston Heights and Lundy's Lane. Like Lawrence Herkimer, he fought in the defense of York.

It remains unknown as to the reasons why MCFN ancestors fought in the War of 1812- it may be surmised that participation in the War was a way of demonstrating continued loyalty as well as ensuring continued presents from the Crown. Participation, too, might have been seen as a way of protecting a way of life that would have been seriously altered had the Americans, with their history of atrocities against Indigenous people, been successful in their conquest of the British colonies. Whatever their motivation, participation by First Nations during the conflict was integral to the successful defense of Canada.

In 1815, a grateful Crown, represented by Col. William Claus, presented a wampum belt to "all Nations" assembled at Fort George. Produced by the British, the wampum belt was meant to memorialize the "interwoven love and friendship" enjoyed by the Indigenous people and the Crown. To symbolize the relationship, the belt employed a zigzag pattern modelled on a Greek key design.



Pledge of the Crown Belt
Photography by Ward P. LaForme Jr.

1840 Treaty Renewal at the Credit

In 1840, a meeting was held at the Credit River to renew a treaty of friendship between the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabek (Ojibway) peoples. The two groups had been enemies during the Beaver Wars of the 17th century until hostilities were ended by the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701. Since 1701, and prior to the meeting at the Credit River Mission Village, the treaty had been renewed several times. The friendship between the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabek continues today as their descendants live in friendship as neighbours on the adjoining Six Nations of the Grand Reserve and the Mississaugas of the Credit Reserve.

Dish with One Spoon Belt



The Great Peace of Montreal refers to the “Dish with One Spoon” wherein the First Nations adherents of the Great Peace of Montreal agreement could hunt in the lands of the Great Lakes region for sustenance. Extracts of a meeting held at the Credit River in January 1840 explain the participants’ understanding of the “Dish with One Spoon” agreement at that time. John Buck, of the Haudenosaunee, supplied an interpretation of the belt:

[21 January 1840]

The Council again met in the afternoon when the Onondaiga Chief called John Buck made a speech and exhibited the wampum belts; the memorials of the old treaties and explained the “talks” contained in them. There were four belts or strings of wampum.

The first belt contained the 1st treaty made between the Six Nations and the Ojebways. This treaty was made many years ago and the great Council was held at the east end of Lake Ontario. The belt represented a dish or bowl in the centre which the Chief said represented that the

Ojebway and the Six Nations were all to eat out of one dish. That is to have all the game in common. In the centre of the bowl were few white [beads] which represented a beaver's tail the favorite dish of the Ojebways. At this council the treaty of friendship was formed and agreed to call each other forever after "Brother". That this Treaty of friendship was made so strong that if a tree fell across their arms it could not separate them or cause them to unloose their hold.

The Yellowhead Belt³

The following day, Chief Yellowhead, speaking on behalf of the Ojibway, using what is commonly referred to as the “Yellowhead Belt” by the Mississaugas of the Credit, provided an alternate interpretation of the “Dish with One Spoon” agreement:

[22 January 1840]

Chief Yellowhead rose up and made a speech and exhibited the great wampum belt of the Six Nations and explained the talk contained in it. This wampum was about 3 feet long and 4 inches wide. It had a row of white wampum in the centre, running from one end to the other, and the other, and the representatives of wigwams every now and then and a large round wampum tied nearly the middle of the Belt was given by the Nahdooways [Iroquois] to the Ojebways many years ago, about the time the French first came to this country. That the great Council took place at Lake Superior. That the Nahdaways made the road or path and pointed out the different council fires which were to be kept lighted.

The first marks on the wampum represented that a council fire should be kept burning at the Sault St. Marie.

The 2nd mark represents the Council fire at the Manitoulin Island, where a beautiful white fish was placed, who should watch the fire as long as the world stood.

The 3rd mark represents the council fire placed on an island opposite Penetanquishem Bay, on which was placed a Beaver to watch the fire.

The 4th mark represents the council fire lighted up at the Narrows of Lake Simcoe at which place was put a white reindeer. To him the reindeer was committed the keeping of this Wampum talk. At this place our fathers hung up the Sun and said that the sun should be a witness to all what had been done and when any of their descendants saw the sun they might remember the acts of their forefathers.

³ The “Yellowhead” belt found in the collection is not an actual replica of the belt spoken about by Chiefs Yellowhead and Johnston. As no precise description of the beadwork comprising the belt exists, Anishinaabe researcher, Alan Corbiere and Haudenosaunee wampum maker, Ken Maracle, collaborated to fashion the belt held in the MCFN collection. Corbiere refers to the belt as the “Eternal Council Fire Belt”.

At the Narrows our fathers placed a dish with Ladles around it and a Ladle for the Six Nations, who said to the Ojibways that the dish or bowl should never be emptied, but he (Yellowhead) was sorry to say that it had already been accepted, not by the Six Nations on the Grand River, but by the Caucanewaugas [Mohawks] residing near Montreal.

The 5th mark represents the Council fire which was placed at this River Credit where a beautiful white headed Eagle was placed upon a very tall pine tree in order to watch the council fires and see if any ill winds blew upon the smoke of the Council fires. A dish was also placed at the Credit. That the right of hunting on the north side of the Lake was secured to the Ojebways and that the Six Nations were not to hunt here only when they came to smoke the pipe of peace with their Ojebway brethern. The path on the wampum went from the Credit over to the other side of the Lake, the country of the Six Nations thus ended the talk of Yellowhead and his wampum.



With regard to the “Dish with One Spoon” agreement, Chief Yellowhead indicates the “Dish with One Spoon” agreement was made with the Mohawks living near Montreal. He further went on to explain that the right to hunt north of Lake Ontario was only for the Anishinaabe; the Haudenosaunee were to hunt below Lake Ontario. The minutes then record Mohawk Chief John S. Johnston’s interpretation of the Yellowhead Belt.

[22 January 1840, con’t]

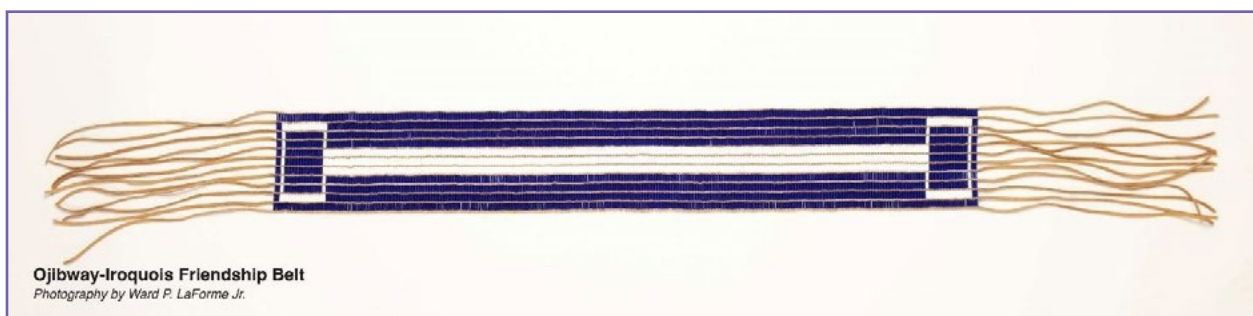
Johnston then proceeded to recapitulate what had been said by Yellowhead and John Sunday and explained the emblems contained in the wampum belt brought by Yellowhead, which he said they acknowledged to be the acts of their fathers.

- 1. The Council fire at the Sault St. Marie has no emblem because there the Council was held.*

2. *The Council fire at Manitoulin has the emblem of a beautiful white fish. This signifies a clear white heart. That all our hearts ought to be white towards each other.*
3. *The emblem of a Beaver placed at an Island on Penetanguishene Bay denotes wisdom.*
4. *The emblem of a white deer placed at Lake Simcoe signifies superiority at which was also the sun, by whom our fathers swore, and the Dish and ladles represents abundance of game and food.*
5. *The Eagle perched on a tall pine tree at the Credit denotes watching and swiftness in conveying messages. The Eagle was to watch all the council fires between the Six Nations and the Ojibways and as he can see far he was put there to watch and if he saw anything to fly and communicate the same to the distant tribes.*

The Ojibway Friendship Belt

The renewal of the Treaty of Friendship between the Ojibway (Anishinaabek) and the Haudenosaunee in 1840 at the Credit River was not the first. Renewals had occurred three times prior to the event at the Credit River. Although no description of the treaty belt(s) present at the renewals exist, it seems possible that one of the belts was the Ojibway Friendship Belt. The two squares joined by a solid line represent the Ojibway and Haudenosaunee joined to each other by a path of peace.

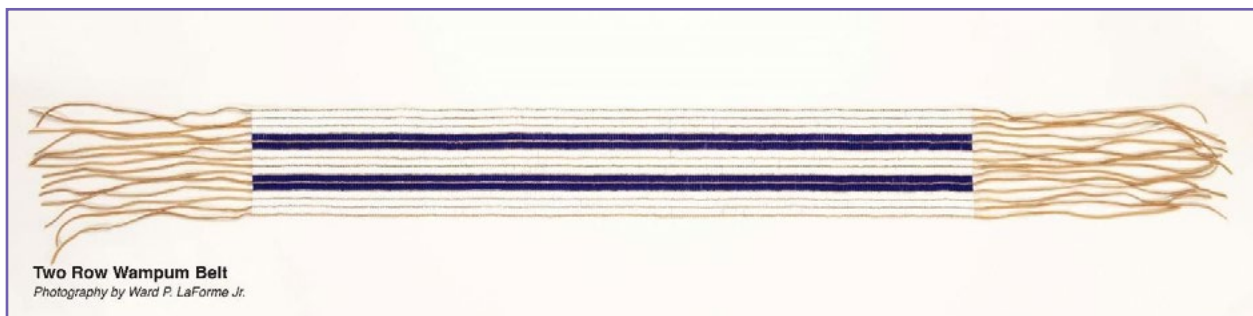


Ojibway-Iroquois Friendship Belt
Photography by Ward P. LaForme Jr.

The Two Row Wampum Belt

Haudenosaunee oral tradition holds that the Two Row Wampum Belt memorializes the relationship that has existed between the Europeans and Iroquois since the former's arrival in North America. The belt is said to symbolize two vessels travelling parallel to each other down the same river. One vessel is a canoe representing the Haudenosaunee people and their culture; the other vessel- a sailing ship representing the Europeans and their culture. The two vessels running in parallel indicate that the two cultures will travel independently of the other in perpetuity with neither side interfering in the other's affairs. The white beads forming the river between the vessels symbolize the concepts of peace, friendship, and respect.

Many First Nations today, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, recognize the concepts of peace, friendship, and respect embedded in the treaty belt as a guide for meaningful reconciliation between the Crown and Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island.



Modern Day Wampum Belts of Friendship

Two wampum belts in the Mississaugas of the Credit collection are of recent origin and were presented as expressions of friendship towards the First Nation. Both belts in the collection- one from the Town of Caledon, and the other from the YMCA, are rich with symbolism that bring to mind a spirit of respect, friendship, and peace.

Town of Caledon Friendship Belt

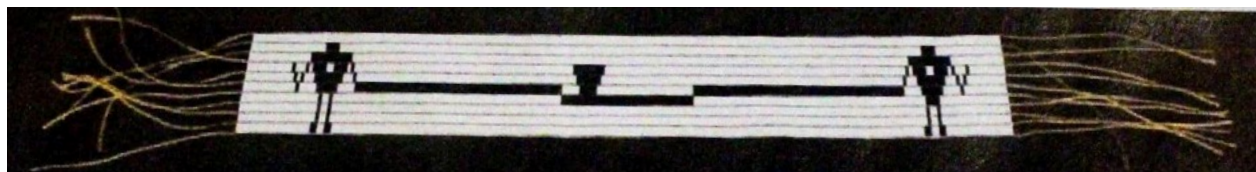


The Caledon Citizen described the wampum belt and its presentation in an October 28, 2018 article. (see extract below)

In 2018, Mayor Allan Thompson presented a Wampum Belt to Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation Chief Stacey LaForme. The belt was commissioned by an Indigenous artist and is inspired by the 200th anniversary of Ajetance Treaty 19, which encompasses the Town of Caledon, and includes other important symbols to illustrate the significant and historic meaning behind the presentation.

The Belt features seven white beads representing the benefit to the next seven generations. There are two figures on either side—one to represent Indigenous and one non-indigenous—the distance of each line from each figure is equal to the diagonal line of a renewed friendship and alliance of 200 years.

YMCA and Mississaugas Friendship Belt



This belt was created to represent a friendship agreement between the YMCA and the Mississaugas First Nation. The figure on the left with four beads on the leg represents the Mississaugas. The figure on the right with three on the right represents the YMCA. Both figures show white hearts, which means

honesty and sincerity between both parties. The two figures are connected by three rows of beads that represent a silver covenant chain of peace, friendship and trust.

Perhaps the use of wampum will be revitalized as non-Indigenous and Indigenous people seek to symbolize efforts of reconciliation throughout Canada. If such is the case, the Mississaugas of the Credit Wampum Belt collection will continue to grow.

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The wampum belts photographed by Ward LaForme Jr. were made by Brian Charles, a member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island.

Photos of the Town of Caledon Friendship Belt and YMCA and Mississaugas Friendship Belt are by Caitlin Laforme.

What is Pillar 5: Cultural Awareness, Communications and Outreach?

Pillar 5 is one of 7 key pillars* underpinning the Strategic Plan of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The Strategic Plan is to chart the path of the First Nation as it seeks to attain the goals embedded within its Vision Statement. The MCFN vision for the future includes a strong, caring, and connected membership that respects the earth's gifts and protects the environment for future generations. The vision recognizes our Anishinaabe roots-our history, language, culture, beliefs, and traditions which will inform the programs and services offered to MCFN membership.

Pillar 5 seeks to build awareness of the presence of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, its territory and treaties, and its history, culture, values and traditions. Reaching out to our neighbours locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally, Pillar 5 will provide rich opportunities for learning about the First Nation in the spirit of truth and reconciliation.

***The Seven Pillars include:**

Pillar 1: Inclusive Prosperity, Economic Growth, and Job Creation

Pillar 2: Nation Well-Being and Wellness

Pillar 3: Environment and Sustainability

Pillar 4: Lifelong Learning and Awareness

Pillar 5: Cultural Awareness, Communication and Outreach

Pillar 6: Infrastructure, Community, and Membership Development

Pillar 7: Inclusive Leadership and Governance

