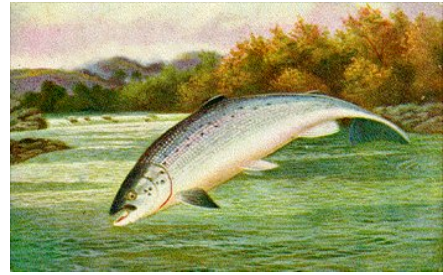


Southern and Central Ontario – Michi Saagiig Historical Context

Official Background Released by Curve Lake First Nation



The traditional homelands of the Michi Saagiig (Mississauga Anishinaabeg) encompass a vast area of what is now known as southern Ontario. The Michi Saagiig are known as “the people of the big river mouths” and were also known as the “Salmon people” who occupied and fished the north shore of Lake Ontario where the various tributaries emptied into the lake. Their territories extended north into and beyond the Kawarthas as winter hunting grounds on which they would break off into smaller social groups for the season, hunting and trapping on these lands, then returning to the lakeshore in the spring for the summer months.

The Michi Saagiig were a highly mobile people, travelling vast distances to produce subsistence for their people. They were also known as the “Peacekeepers” among Indigenous nations. The Michi Saagiig homelands were located directly between two very powerful Confederacies: The Three Fires Confederacy to the north and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy to the south. The Michi Saagiig were the negotiators, the messengers, the diplomats, and they successfully mediated peace throughout this area of Ontario for countless generations.

Michi Saagiig oral histories speak to their people being in this area of Ontario for thousands of years. These stories recount the “Old Ones” who spoke an ancient Algonquian dialect. The histories explain that the current Ojibwa phonology is the 5th transformation of this language, demonstrating a linguistic connection that spans back into deep time. The Michi Saagiig of today are the descendants of the ancient peoples who lived in Ontario during the Archaic and Paleo-Indian periods. They are the original inhabitants of southern Ontario, and they are still here today.

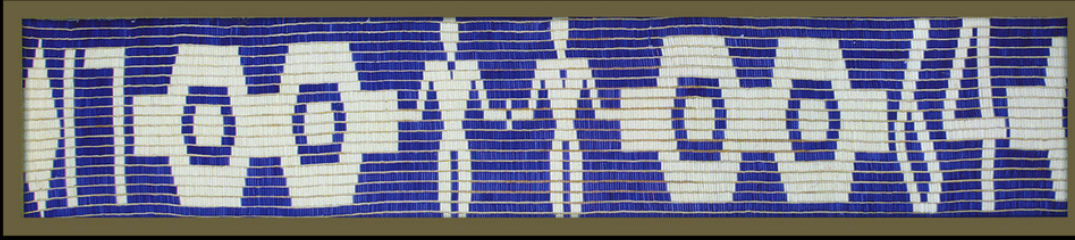
The traditional territories of the Michi Saagiig span from Gananoque in the east, all along the north shore of Lake Ontario, west to the north shore of Lake Erie at Long Point. The territory spreads as far north as the tributaries that flow into these lakes, from Bancroft and north of the Haliburton highlands. This also includes all the tributaries that flow from the height of land north of Toronto like the Oak Ridges Moraine, and all of the rivers that flow into Lake Ontario through Burlington Bay and the Niagara region including Welland and Niagara rivers, and beyond. The western side of the Michi Saagiig Nation was located around the Grand River which was used as a portage route.

Michi Saagiig oral histories also speak to the occurrence of peoples coming to the territory to establish villages and a corn growing economy between 800-1000 A.D. These newcomers included people that would later be known as the Huron-Wendat, Neutral, Petun, and Tobacco Nations. The Michi Saagiig made Treaties with these peoples and granted them permission to stay as visitors in these lands. Wampum was made to record these contracts and these contracts would be renewed annually (see Gitiga Migizi and Kapyrka 2015). The Odawa Nation worked with the Michi Saagiig to meet with the visitor Nations to continue the amical political and economic relationship that existed.

Problems arose for the Michi Saagiig in the 1600s when the European way of life was introduced into southern Ontario. At the same time the Haudenosaunee were given firearms by the colonial governments in New York and Albany which ultimately made an expansion possible for them in Michi Saagiig Territories. There began skirmishes with the various nations living in Ontario at that time. The Haudenosaunee engaged in fighting with the Huron-Wendat and between that and the onslaught of European diseases, the Iroquoian speaking peoples in Ontario were decimated.

The onset of colonial settlement and missionary involvement severely disrupted the original relationships between these Indigenous nations. Disease and warfare had a devastating impact upon the Indigenous peoples of Ontario. The Michi Saagiig were largely able to avoid the devastation caused by these processes by retreating to their wintering grounds to the north. Elder Gitiga Migizi: *“There is a misnomer that we came here after the Huron-Wendat left or were defeated, but that is not true. We are the traditional people, the ones that signed treaties with the Crown. We had peacemakers go to the Haudenosaunee and live amongst them. We are very important in terms of keeping the balance of relationships in harmony.”*

The Michi Saagiig participated in eighteen treaties from 1781 to 1923 to allow the growing number of European settlers to establish in Ontario. Pressures from increased settlement forced the Michi Saagiig to slowly move into small family groups around the present day communities: Curve Lake First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Alderville First Nation, Scugog Island First Nation, New Credit First Nation, and Mississauga First Nation.



The Making of Canada

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 and Great Wampum (1764) are fundamental documents in Canada's legal history. The Royal Proclamation was not a unilateral declaration of the Crown's will in its provisions relating to First Nations, rather First Nations, in prayer, in ceremony, and over many days with many Elders, sang and crafted the Great Wampum because these documents are records and testimonies of the principles that were to guide the relationship between First Nations and the British Crown. The Great Wampum of Niagara and the Royal Proclamation are a treaty (an agreement) between First Nations and the Crown which stands as a positive guarantee of First Nation self-government as well as the mutual obligations of peace and friendship (no interference with rites and provision of support and resources) between Nations.

Transcripts of a meeting in July 1818 at Drummond Island in Lake Huron to the west of Manitoulin between Anishinaabeg peoples and representatives of the British Crown contain articulate references to the Treaty of Niagara. An account of the meeting is as follows:

The Chiefs, laying down a **broad Wampum Belt, made in 1764**; one made in 1786; and one marked Lieutenant M'Dowal, Commanding Michilimackinac, with the pipe of peace marked on it:

"Father (Crown), your children (First Nations) now seated round you, salute you sincerely, they intend to talk to you a great deal, and beg you will listen to them with patience, for they intend to open their hearts to you ..." Holding the Belt of 1764 in his hand he said, *"Father, this my ancestors received from our Father, Sir W. Johnson. You sent word to all your red children to assemble at the crooked place (Niagara). They heard your voice - obeyed the message - and the next summer met you at the place. You then laid this belt on a mat, and said - 'Children, you must all touch this Belt of Peace. I touch it myself, that we may all be brethren united, and hope our friendship will never cease. I will call you my children; will send warmth (presents) to your country; and your families shall never be in want. Look towards the rising sun. My Nation is as brilliant as it is, and its word cannot be violated.' Father, your words were true - all you promised came to pass. On giving us the Belt of Peace, you said - 'If you should ever require my assistance, send this Belt, and my hand will be immediately stretched forth to assist you."*

These were the founding agreements of Canada