

WHERE HISTORIES MEET: INDIGENOUS AND SETTLER ENCOUNTERS IN THE TORONTO AREA

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Deep Time in the Humber River Watershed

Let's dip back into the deep "before" time of Emerson Benson Nanigishkung's story. Indigenous peoples have lived in North America since time immemorial. They were the first humans to inhabit the two American continents, and their cultures were developed here. There's currently no consensus on the earliest date for the Indigenous presence in the Americas. Archaeological research confirms that Indigenous peoples have been living in at least some areas of Turtle Island (North America) for more than 20,000 years, but new evidence continues to push back the date.¹ By comparison, the oldest continuous European settlements in what is now Canada are a little over 400 years old.

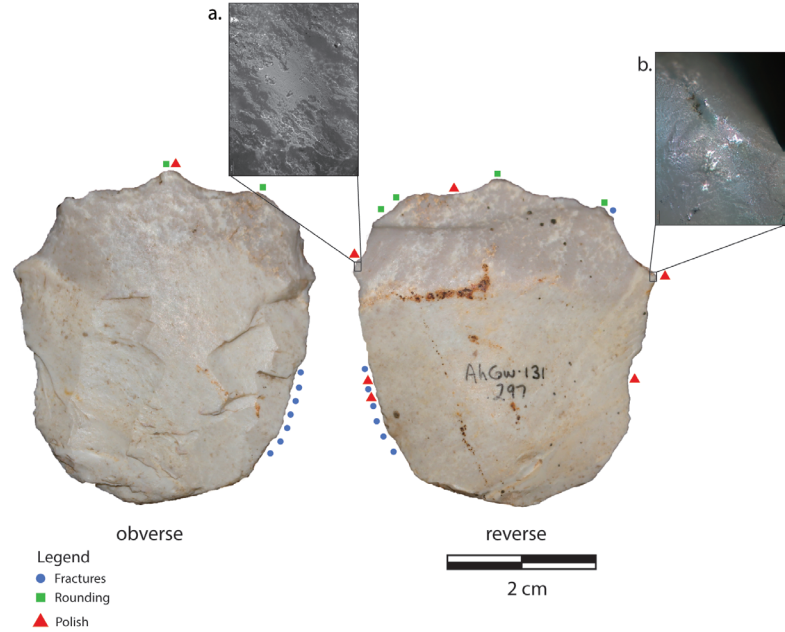
The time scale for an Indigenous presence in North America is so vast it's hard to comprehend: Indigenous peoples were here during the Pleistocene era before agriculture or metallurgy had been invented anywhere in the world and before livestock animals were domesticated. The world of ancient Indigenous peoples was vastly different from our world and from their world at the time of the arrival of Europeans. The global climate was considerably colder, and most of the animal species present 14,500 years ago or longer are now extinct.²

Indigenous peoples have lived in the Toronto region since at least 11,000 BCE, possibly earlier.³ There's archaeological evidence that they hunted mastodon in the Red Hill Valley in Hamilton 13,000 years ago, after the approximately 2-kilometre-thick glaciers that covered the region for thousands of years melted.⁴ Footprints discovered by workmen digging a tunnel under Toronto Bay in 1908 (but unfortunately destroyed at the time) are thought to have been 10,000 years old.

Over millennia the ancestors of today's Indigenous peoples adapted to numerous ecological changes, including the melting of glaciers; the rise and fall of water levels in local lakes, rivers, and drainage systems; periods of warming or cooling; and changing vegetation and animal life. The earliest known peoples in the Toronto area were nomadic hunters who followed herds of large mammals over tundra. When climate and landscape features changed to mixed deciduous forest around 7000 BCE (about the time of the ancient Sumerians in what is now Iraq), Indigenous peoples were drawn to bountiful flora and wildlife—including deer, fish, ducks, and wild rice—along local rivers.

Agriculture was invented independently in several regions of the world. Indigenous peoples in southern Mexico domesticated corn (also known as maize) about ten thousand years ago, and seed

A 13,000-year-old tool recovered from the Red Hill Valley showing traces of mastodon blood | Courtesy of Archeological Services Inc.



Heritage Toronto commemorative plaque about the 1908 discovery of ancient footprints of adults and a child beneath Toronto Bay | Courtesy of Heritage Toronto



ANCIENT FOOTPRINTS



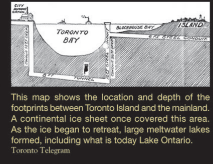
City inspector W.H. Cross made this sketch of the footprints, possibly left by people wearing moccasins, before they were destroyed. It is the only evidence of the find. Cross described them as follows: "It looked like a trail ... you could follow one man the whole way. Some footprints were on top of the others, partly obliterating them. There were footprints of all sizes, and a single print of a child's foot."
Toronto Telegram

Between 10,000 and 13,000 years ago, Indigenous people walking in this area left footprints that were preserved in clay and later covered by Lake Ontario. In 1908, workers building a tunnel under the Toronto Bay located the footprints by accident.

The land now within Toronto has been near a major body of water for thousands of years. Small bands of nomadic hunters moved into the Great Lakes region about 13,000 years ago. These people hunted caribou, mammoths, mastodons, and other game. At this time, the shoreline of Lake Ontario was more than a kilometre (3,281 feet) south of its present location.

In 1908, workers building a waterworks tunnel near Hanlan's Point found more than 100 individual human footprints in a layer of clay 21 metres (70 feet) below the water. They indicated that people were moving north in the direction of today's downtown Toronto, possibly from a waterfront camp.

The prints were not preserved. The workers continued building the tunnel and destroyed the footprints in the process. Because the prints were lost, it is impossible to say if they were genuine, but experts believe them to have been authentic.

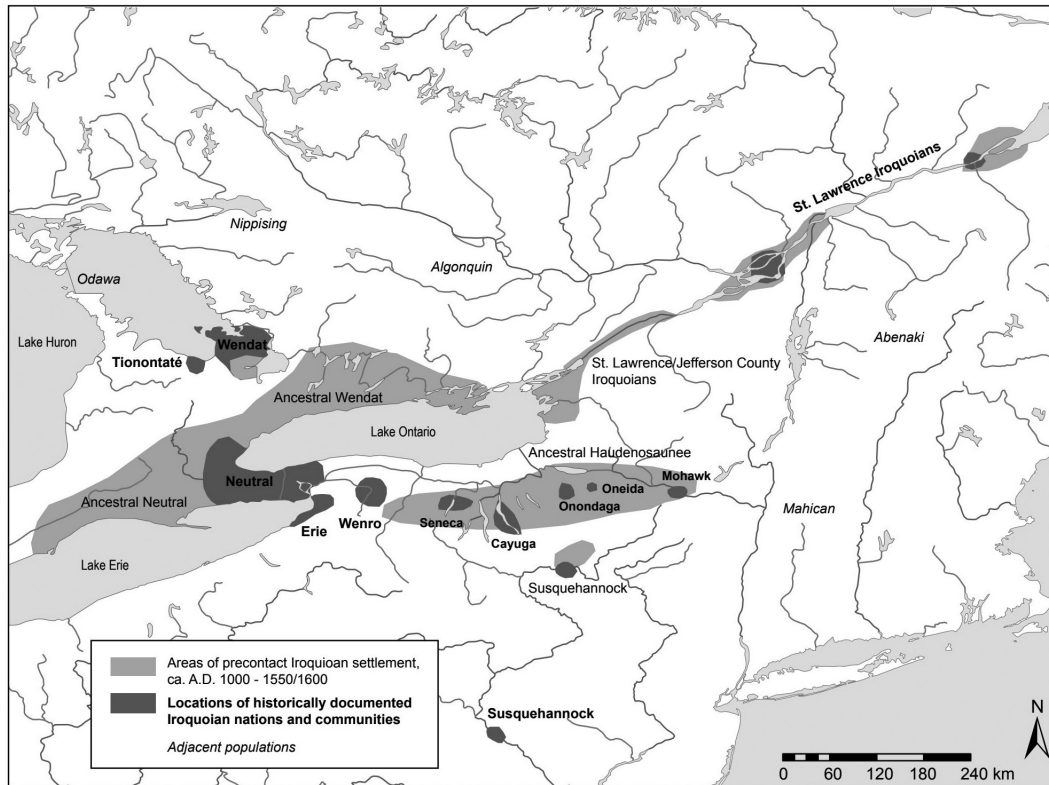


This map shows the location and depth of the footprints between Toronto Island and the mainland. A continental ice sheet once covered this area. As the ice began to retreat, large meltwater lakes formed, including what is today Lake Ontario.
Toronto Telegram



The tunnel system for the Island waterworks has been progressively built up since the 1890s, when this photo was taken. This tunnel is similar to the one constructed in 1903, when the footprints were uncovered.
City of Toronto Archives

HERITAGE TORONTO 2021



Wendat and other adjacent Iroquoian societies. The Odawa / Odaawaa, Nipissing, and Algonquin are historical Anishinaabe neighbours | Birch and Williamson, “Navigating Ancestral Landscapes in the Northern Iroquoian World”

corn and corn-growing technology were gradually shared with peoples to the north. By 800 CE (possibly earlier), some Indigenous peoples on the north shore of Lake Ontario were planting corn.⁵ As horticulture spread and new crops were introduced, some groups established semi-permanent villages along the region’s rivers, while others continued to move seasonally to hunt, fish, and harvest and then gather in larger groups in spring and fall.

Over time, two distinct cultural patterns emerged: the Wendat, Attawandaron (Neutral), and Haudenosaunee, who were semi-sedentary horticulturalists; and the Anishinaabek and

related peoples, who followed the older hunter-gatherer way of life. Scholars would later categorize the horticulturalists as “Iroquoian,” which caused confusion as the category included other sizable and related groups, such as the Wendat and Attawandaron—“Northern Iroquoians”—who were culturally similar but politically distinct from those known as “Iroquois” or Haudenosaunee.

Indigenous peoples developed ways of living and flourishing that supported living lightly on the land. They created cultural practices that ensured sustainable interconnections between land, water, and all beings. They passed on their

knowledge, lifeways, values, and cultural identity through stories rooted in the land.

We had governance systems. We had protocols, etiquettes, and relationships with other Nations. We were stewards of the land and the waters.

—Vicki Snache, Chippewas of Rama⁶

Everything they had would have been things they made. What we call crafts today . . . And, of course, they made quill boxes and ash baskets. Water vessels and sap vessels. Those were made from porcupine quills, from sweetgrass, from birchbark, from sinew. And all those things were gathered.

—Ben Cousineau, Chippewas of Rama⁷

Three Indigenous Nations

Today, three Nations—Wendat, Onödowa'ga or Seneca, and Mississauga / Anishinaabek—claim the Toronto area as their historical territory. All had villages in the Humber watershed and used the Toronto Carrying-Place Trail. They maintain connections and relationships to the area and have ancestral connections to earlier peoples of the Great Lakes region whose names aren't known to us.

Wendat Villages on the Humber River and Black Creek

From roughly 1200 to 1600 CE, Wendat peoples (later called Huron by the French) lived in large, palisaded Longhouse villages surrounded by extensive corn fields, including along the Humber River and its tributaries. Skandatut (near present-day Kleinberg) was the largest of these villages, housing an estimated two thousand people. A fifteenth-century village overlooking Black Creek was located just south of today's York University, a short walk from what is now The Village at Black Creek. Archaeologists named it the Parsons site after the farm family who owned the site when it was first excavated in the early 1950s. The palisaded village housed up to fifteen hundred people in forty to fifty Longhouses; beyond the village, the inhabitants grew the Three Sisters (corn, squash, and beans) in fields that extended in an estimated 1-kilometre radius, including much of what is now York University.⁸

The Wendat were allies and trading partners of the Anishinaabe peoples who lived along the Canadian Shield to the north and the Bruce Peninsula to the west. The Attawandaron / Neutrals, who were Iroquoian speakers like the Wendat and Haudenosaunee, lived just to the west of the Wendat. Some appear to have had a presence in the Wendat villages along the Humber.

Beginning in the 1300s, Wendat communities gradually moved their villages north to the region known as Huronia or Wendake, to the west of Lake Simcoe and especially on the Penetanguishene Peninsula. There, they joined the Wendat Confederacy of four (possibly five)



Wendat bird effigy found along the Humber River | Courtesy of Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

Ekionkiestha' National Longhouse. A reconstruction of a Wendat longhouse, Musée Huron-Wendat, Wendake, Quebec | Photo by Stéphane Audet

Interior of Ekionkiestha' National Longhouse | Photo by Neufast, Creative Commons Licence Attribute-Share Alike 3.0 Unported Licence, Wikimedia Commons

Nations. It is believed that the last Wendat communities left the Toronto area about 1610, although it remained Wendat hunting territory until 1649–50.

In the early 1600s, the Wendat became allies and trading partners of the French. Explorer Samuel de Champlain overwintered with them in Huronia in 1615. That same year, Etienne Brulé might have travelled the Humber route from Huronia to Lake Ontario with several Wendat companions on their way to the country of the Susquehannas.

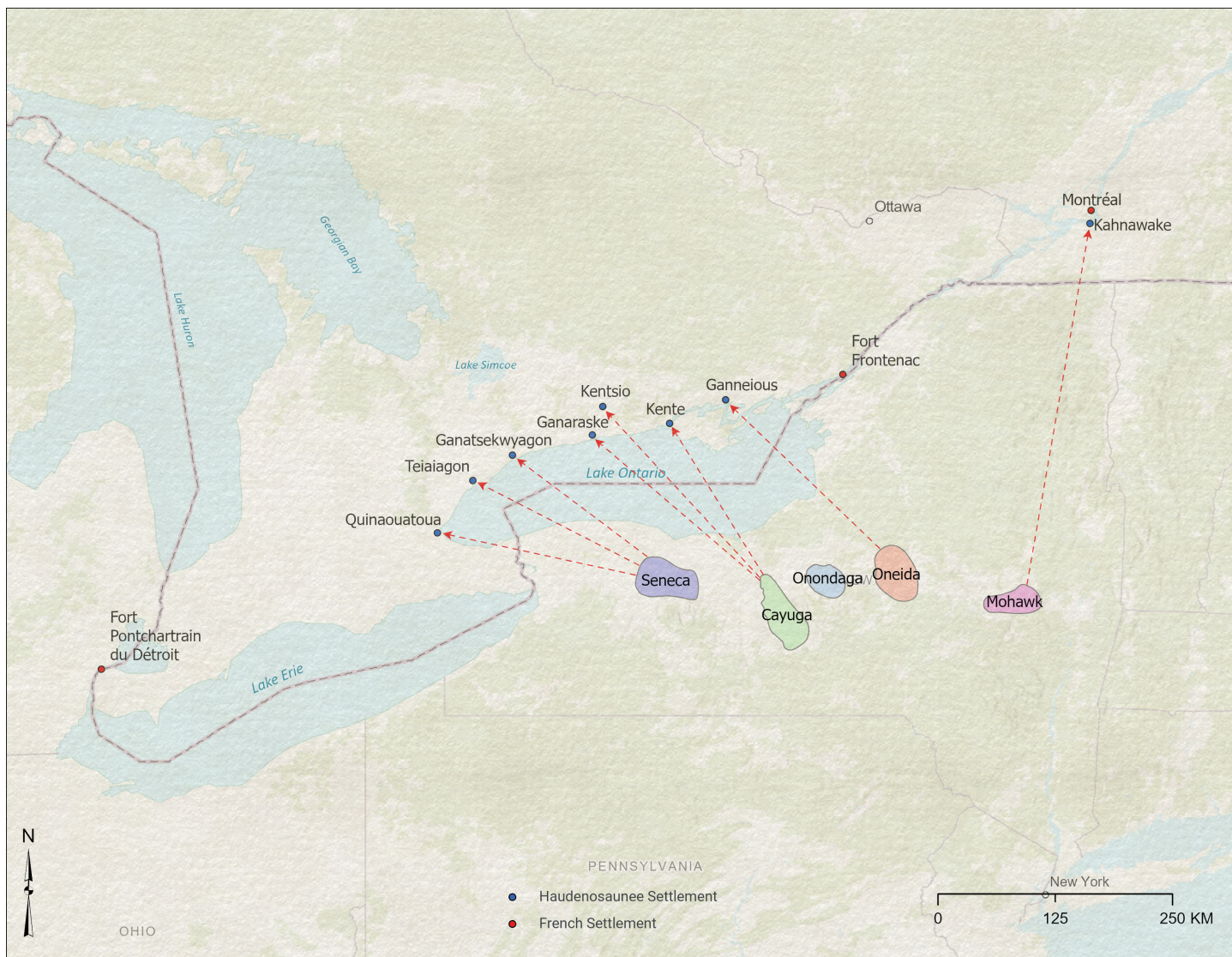
Contact with the French exposed the Wendat to epidemic diseases, notably smallpox, that decimated the Wendat population, reduced their military strength, destabilized their culture, and led to many conversions to Christianity, fuelling internal divisions. In 1649–50, Seneca and Mohawk warriors of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy travelled north, likely along the Humber Portage route, and attacked the Wendats in the Lake Simcoe / Georgian Bay area. The Wendat Confederacy was defeated and broken up.⁹

Many Wendat fled to Quebec, the Detroit / Windsor area, and beyond, while roughly half were absorbed (as captives or adoptees) into the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. After 1650, some Wendat and members of the neighbouring Tionontaté / Petun Confederacy, which had also been defeated by the Haudenosaunee, regrouped in the Detroit area and became known as the Wyandot. The Neutrals were also defeated and absorbed by the Haudenosaunee; they no longer exist independently.

Today, the dispersed Wendats have regrouped as the Huron-Wendat Nation of Wendake, Quebec, the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation in Michigan, the Wyandot Nation of Kansas, and the Wyandotte Nation in Oklahoma, and have formally renewed the Wendat Confederacy. The Huron-Wendat of Quebec are the spokespeople for their heritage in Ontario, working to repatriate artifacts, rebury uncovered human remains, and ceremonially protect and honour their ancestors in the Toronto region. They have collaborated with other local First Nations on regional heritage projects such as the Shared Path, an installation of story circles and interpretative signage along the Humber River.

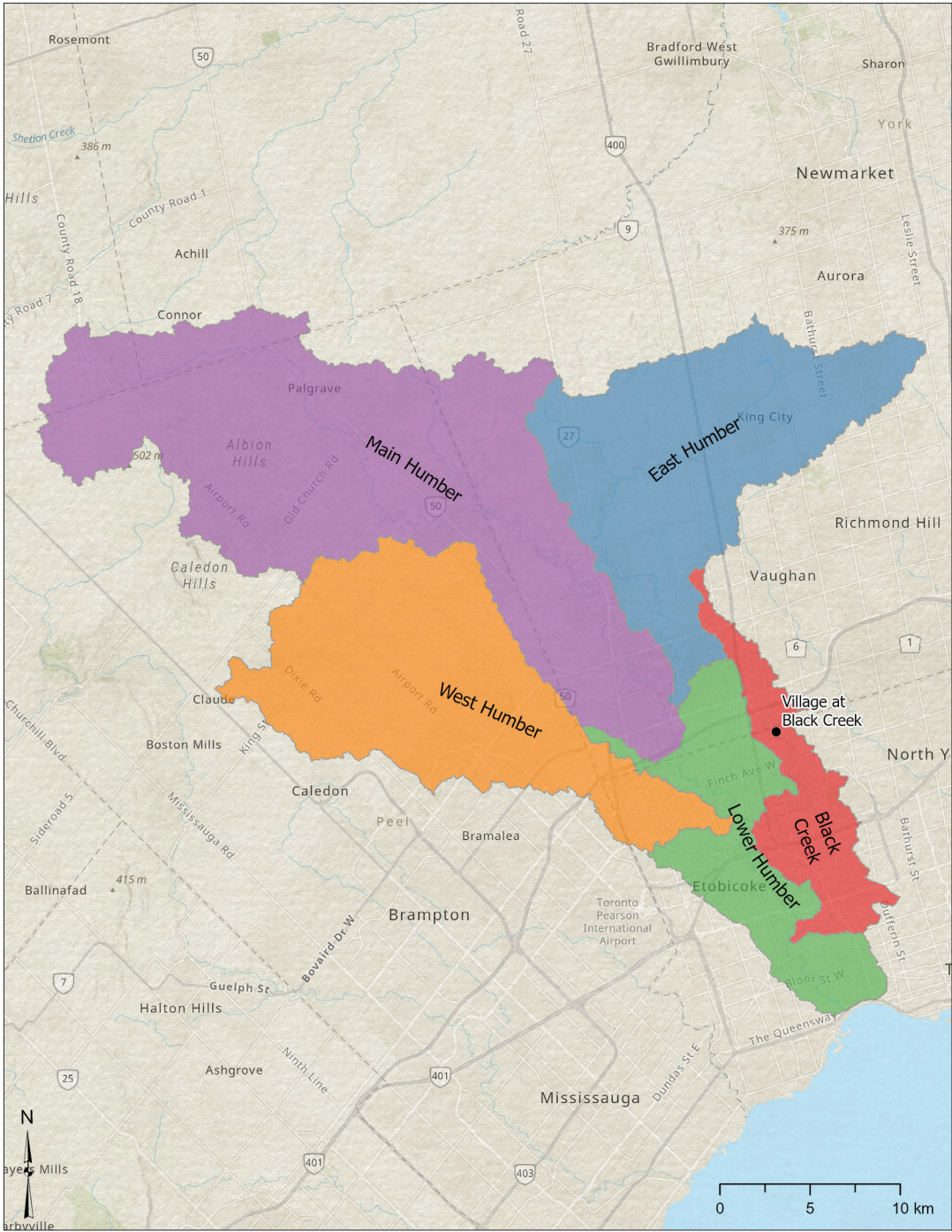
The Seneca Village of Teiaiaagon

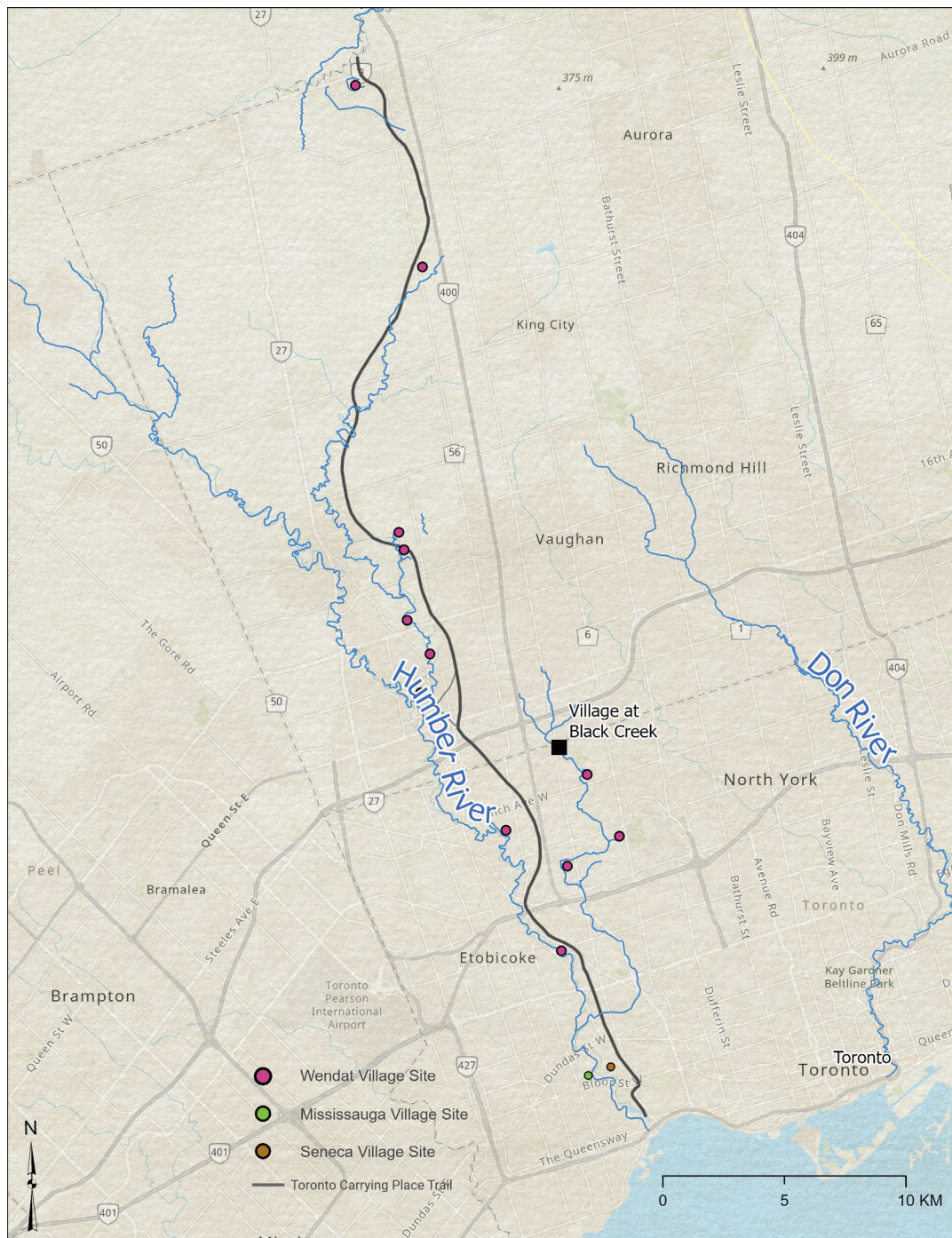
After the 1649–50 defeat of the Wendats, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy established villages along the north shore of Lake Ontario, and the Toronto area came under the control of the Onödowa'ga or Seneca. As the fur trade expanded, the area became strategically important because the Humber and Rouge Rivers gave access to the best furs, which came from the North. The Seneca transported them via Lake Ontario to the French at Montreal and the more distant Dutch and English, their military and trading allies, along the Hudson River in what is now New York State. In the 1670s, French fur traders and explorers began to visit the large village of Teiaiaagon along the Humber and its sister village, Ganatsekwyagon, on the Rouge.¹⁰



Haudenosaunee villages on the north shore of Lake Ontario in the late seventeenth century. The exact location of the small outpost of Quinaouatoua (Tinawatawa) at the head of the lake is still disputed.

Humber and Black
Creek watersheds





Historical Wendat, Seneca, and Mississauga villages on the Humber River



Reproduction of a moose antler comb from Teiaiagon, c. 1680s, Toronto | Photo by John Howarth, courtesy of Archeological Services Inc.

About 1700, following warfare with the French and Anishinaabek, the Seneca abandoned these villages and returned to their territories south of Lake Ontario. According to Anishinaabe oral tradition, the Haudenosaunee were defeated and forced to leave the north shore of the lake, and the Mississaugas took over the territory by right of conquest.

After prolonged attack, ourselves, our allies, come down, cross Georgian Bay. Attack. Had our first battle at Orillia. At least that's what we say. Orillia. Then split our forces off, our big force, into two forces. One group went eastward [to] Rice Lake, Alderville, those folks, and the Mississaugas of the Credit ancestors travelled down the Humber River [Toronto] Carrying Place and fought at this end of Lake Ontario and drove out the Haudenosaunee at this end.

—Darin Wybenga, Mississaugas of the Credit¹¹

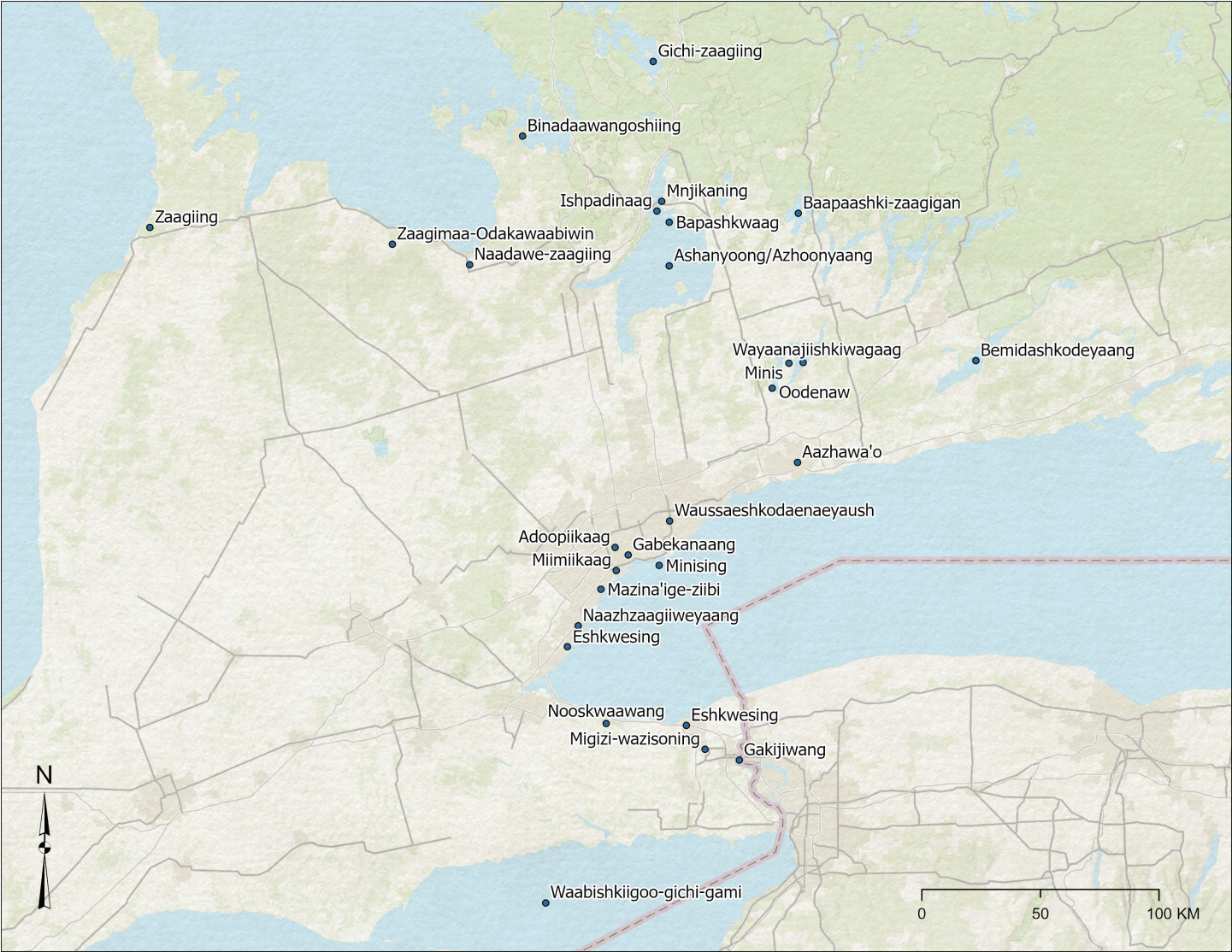
The Haudenosaunee dispute this narrative. According to their oral tradition, the Five Nations allowed Mississauga occupation through diplomatic agreement. They also negotiated with the British to retain and protect their rights to their hunting territories on the north shore of Lake Ontario through the Nanfan Deed of 1701. In the view of the Haudenosaunee, they did not relinquish their title to lands in present-day southern Ontario acquired by the right of conquest over the Wendats even after it was occupied by the Anishinaabek / Mississaugas. Today, the Six Nations of the Grand River (near Brantford, Ontario) assert treaty rights to the Toronto area that are contested by the Mississaugas of the Credit.¹²

The Mississauga / Anishinaabe Village on the Humber

Unrelated culturally to the Wendat or Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabek were allies of the



Mississauga routes into southern Ontario



Anishinaabe place names

Wendat and French. In the early 1600s, they lived in territories around Lakes Huron and Superior. According to Anishinaabe oral tradition, around the 1660s they began pushing south. They attacked the Haudenosaunee and drove them from the Anishinaabe territories the Haudenosaunee had invaded after defeating the Wendats in 1650. In subsequent decades, the Anishinaabek moved into the former territories of their Wendat allies along the north shore of Lake Ontario.

Anishinaabek who moved south from near the Mississagi River on the north shore of Lake Huron to the north shore of Lake Ontario around 1695 came to be known to Europeans as the Mississaugas (possibly derived from Michi Saagiig, referring to a river with many mouths, or the Anishinaabe word for “eagle.”)

The Mississaugas came from the North Shore. This is the more recent story, but the Creation story brings us in from the East Coast. We're still related all around the Great Lakes with all the different people.

—Carolyn King, Mississaugas of the Credit¹³

One group of Mississaugas travelled south via the Humber Portage route and established control and stewardship over territories from the Rouge River in the east to Long Point on Lake Erie in the west. They established a summer village on the west bank of the Humber across the river from the abandoned Seneca village of Teiaiagon and another on the Rouge at the former

site of Ganetsekwyagon. The Mississaugas then established camps along all the major rivers and their Council Fire (seat of government) and main village at the mouth of the Credit. They became known as the Mississaugas of the Credit. The Humber Portage connected them to related Anishinaabek who established territories around Lake Simcoe, eastern Georgian Bay, Lake Scugog, and Peterborough.

The Anishinaabek moved seasonally to hunt and fish, plant gardens, process maple sugar, and gather berries, roots, and medicines. In the spring and fall, they gathered in large numbers at major fishing sites such as Mnjikaning (or the Narrows) and at the mouth of the Credit River, where they held Councils, socialized, found marriage partners, and conducted ceremonies. After living in villages over the summer, they dispersed in winter into smaller family hunting groups in the interior forests.

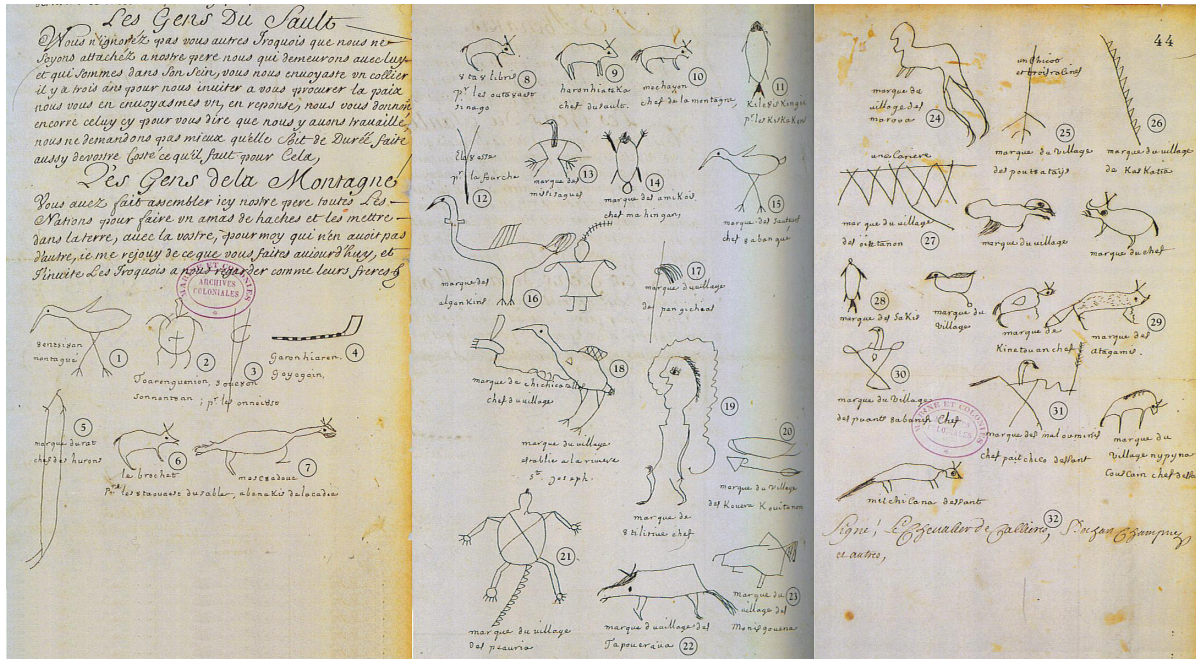
The Mississaugas traded furs with the French, who built their first trading post on the Humber in 1720. Yet even during the period of nominal French control, and especially after concluding a diplomatic agreement with the Six Nations in 1700–1701, which granted them safe passage through Haudenosaunee territory, the Mississaugas also traded with the English at Albany.

Regional Alliances and Agreements before 1787

Indigenous peoples have long traditions of diplomacy and treaty making, often activated and commemorated through Wampum. Wampum



Replica of Dish with One Spoon Wampum, handmade by Ken Maracle, a Faith Keeper of the Lower Cayuga Longhouse and a member of the Cayuga Nation, Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Deer Clan. The replica was purchased for use by University of Windsor faculty and staff in their teaching | Photo provided by Leddy Library, University of Windsor



Indigenous leaders used their Doodem marks rather than personal signatures to sign agreements with Europeans. These are from the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701 | Wikimedia Commons

is a string or belt made from beads fashioned from purple and white marine shells. According to Haudenosaunee oral tradition, Wampum was first used ceremonially by the Peacemaker and Aienwatha / Hiawatha, the founders of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

Considered a living presence with the power to manifest stories, Wampum was exchanged during meetings between Nations of the Great Lakes region to demonstrate respect and serious intent. Wampum's symbolic designs embodied the words and pledges made in its presence and their permanence. Successive generations of Wampum Keepers were responsible for maintaining the oral memory of treaties and reciting the meaning of a Wampum Belt in Councils where they were renewed. Unfortunately, colonial disruption hindered the intergenerational transmission of the meanings of some Wampum symbols, complicating the interpretation of some historical agreements in the present. Cultural and archival research is being undertaken to try to recover these meanings.

In 1700, after a long period of warfare exacerbated by the fur trade and competing alliances with the French and English, the Anishinaabek (including the Mississaugas) and the Haudenosaunee concluded a peace agreement commemorated in the Dish with One Spoon Wampum. In eastern North America, a shared dish or kettle is an ancient metaphor in Indigenous diplomacy. It figures in many treaty relationships and alliances, including the Great Law of Peace that unites the Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and appears to have been used in agreements



Replica of the Five Nations or Aienwatha / Hiawatha Wampum Belt of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy | Photo courtesy of Jake Thomas Learning Centre

between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek before the version agreed to in 1700–1701. The metaphor was key to the 1701 regional peace negotiated at a gathering of thirteen hundred delegates from thirty-nine Indigenous Nations from across eastern North America convened at Montreal by the French. The Great Peace of Montreal ended a near century of conflict, often referred to as the Beaver Wars, between the French and their Indigenous allies and the Haudenosaunee.

Present-day Toronto land acknowledgements often refer to the Dish with One Spoon as an agreement to share the resources of the Great Lakes region. But the terms are remembered



Regional Anishinaabe Council Fires (seats of governance) as represented in the Eternal Council Fires Wampum Belt and interpreted by Chief Musquakie / William Yellowhead in 1840. The actual Wampum Belt has not survived. Clan symbols are reproduced from Chiefs' Doodem signatures on treaty documents and indicate the Doodem responsible for maintaining each Council Fire or seat of governance. In his reading, Musquakie mentioned Sault Ste. Marie as the site of the first Council Fire but did not specify the Doodem. However, the Crane is the predominant Doodem at that location.

differently by the two parties. The Haudenosaunee maintain that the agreement is to share the resources on the north shore of Lake Ontario (they also claim a right to north shore resources through the Nanfan Deed, negotiated with the British in 1701).

So, in the 1700s, the Great Peace at Montreal, where we all came together, forty Nations came together and put an end to the Indian Wars. It was called the Dish with One Spoon Treaty, where we all agreed to share these lands in a respectful manner for the environment, conservation. We all were to keep that dish clean and leave enough for our other brothers to share from. It was not an ownership issue to those lands, because title and ownership was foreign to us.

—Phil Monture, Six Nations of the Grand River¹⁴

The Anishinaabek dispute that the agreement was to share the land and resources unconditionally. Instead, they insist that the peace agreed to in 1701 recognized territorial sovereignty and that a second Wampum Belt, the Yellowhead or Eternal Council Fires Wampum Belt (also part of the peacemaking process between the Anishinaabek and Haudenosaunee), provides persuasive evidence that the sharing of resources was intended to be conditional upon intertribal diplomacy and permission.¹⁵ Now lost but described in detail at a joint Council in 1840, it signified Haudenosaunee

recognition of regional Anishinaabe Council Fires, including at the Narrows (Mnjikaning) and Credit River, the Clans responsible for them, their duties, and where and when resources were to be shared with the Haudenosaunee.¹⁶

I know, politically, our people were bound with a number of different communities through, not just our Nation, but communities through Wampum. Chief Yellowhead [Musquakie] was a Wampum carrier and speaker . . . He carried that one Wampum. He was the speaker of that one Wampum that encapsulated all the different communities; mentioned all the different communities that were surrounding our territory of Rama.

—Kory Snache, Chippewas of Rama¹⁷

Wampum was also exchanged with Europeans. Military and trading alliances were negotiated following Indigenous protocols and included extensive gift giving. The French and English gave their allies annual presents to maintain their loyalty and signify their ongoing good intentions. These alliances recognized Indigenous sovereignty and were key to the commercial competition between the English and French in the fur trade.

Going right back to the 1613. Our Two Row [Wampum] and the relationship we're supposed to have with the Dutch.

*Our peace, friendship, and respect . . .
and how we were to respect each other's
governments, never trying to impose their
laws upon us and likewise, us upon them.
To the 1664, when Great Britain wanted a
similar treaty with the Five Nations, which
we honoured.*

—Phil Monture, Six Nations of the
Grand River¹⁸