

The Meaning of *Kaswentha* and the Two Row Wampum Belt in Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) History: Can Indigenous Oral Tradition be Reconciled with the Documentary Record?

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Abstract

This essay analyzes the colonial era documentary record for corroboration of Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) oral tradition regarding the *kaswentha* (as currently understood and represented in the form of a Two-Row wampum belt). Eighteen different recitations of the tradition appear in documentary sources from 1656 to 1755. These findings demonstrate substantial convergence and complementarity between two perspectives on the past and suggest that the comparison and integration of indigenous oral tradition and documentary research may yield a more robust understanding of the past than would be the case of either undertaken alone.

Keywords

kaswentha; Iroquois; diplomacy; Two Row wampum belt; Haudenosaunee

Among the numerous heated debates concerning the Haudenosaunee past that have occurred over the past three decades we find significant divergence of opinion between Haudenosaunee and non-Native scholars regarding the historicity of the concept of *kaswentha* (as currently understood and represented in the form of a Two Row wampum belt). This essay analyzes this dispute and asks whether the different forms of historical knowledge privileged by the respective advocates may be reconciled with one another.¹

¹ This essay contains selections from the author's, "Separate Vessels: Iroquois Engagements with the Dutch of New Netherland, circa 1613-1664", forthcoming in Jaap Jacobs and L.H. Roper (eds.), *The Worlds of the Seventeenth-Century Hudson Valley* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2014). I thank the editors for permission to reuse this

Should we simply agree to disagree, acknowledging the “inherent right of tribal peoples to interpret events and time in their worlds according to their aesthetics and values,” and that there is “more than one way to understand, present, and record history”?² Should variations, gaps, and shortcomings in the European-authored record assume precedence over an arguably unbroken line of Native oral tradition concerning a particular phenomenon? Or should we place the two lines of evidence into dialogue with one another to try and determine whether and how they may be integrated?³ This essay adopts the latter approach, analyzing colonial-era documentary record for corroboration of Haudenosaunee tradition concerning *kaswentha*. The findings discussed below demonstrate substantial convergence and complementarity between the two perspectives and suggest that in this case the comparison and integration of oral tradition and documentary research might yield a more robust understanding of the past than would be the case of either undertaken alone.

Kaswentha may best be understood as a Haudenosaunee term embodying the ongoing negotiation of their relationship to European colonizers and their descendants; the underlying concept of *kaswentha* emphasizes the distinct identity of the two peoples and a mutual engagement to coexist in peace without interference in the affairs of the other. The Two Row Belt, as it is commonly known, depicts the *kaswentha* relationship in visual form via a long beaded belt of white wampum with two parallel lines of purple

material. For an overview of the debates which include the timing of the formation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the influence of Haudenosaunee ideas on the United States Constitution, see Gail Landsman, “Anthropology, Theory, and Research in Iroquois Studies, 1980-1990: Reflections from a Disability Studies Perspective”, *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 2 (2006), pp. 242-63. For recent treatments of the Constitutional influence and League formation debates, see Bruce E. Johansen, “The Influence Thesis Revisited,” *European Review of Native American Studies* 21 (2007), pp. 49-53; William A. Starna, “Retrospecting the Origins of the League of the Iroquois,” *American Philosophical Society Proceedings* 152 (2008), pp. 279-321. My use of *kaswentha* in this essay reflects the modal spelling of the term in recent publications authored by Haudenosaunee scholars.

² Anna Lee Walters, *Talking Indian: Reflections on Survival and Writing* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1992) (“inherent right of...”, p. 86). For a related assessment of conflicting documentary and oral evidence regarding an indigenous tradition, see Carla Gerona, “Caddo Sun Accounts Across Time and Place,” *American Indian Quarterly* 36 (2012), pp. 348-76 (“more than one...”, p. 349). Cf. Russel Lawrence Barsh, “Netukulimk Past and Present: Mi'kmaw Ethics and the Atlantic Fishery,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37 (2002), pp. 15-42.

³ For an analogous effort involving integrative analysis of oral tradition with archaeological research, see Aron L. Crowell and Wayne K. Howell, “Time, Oral Tradition, and Archaeology at Xakwnoowú, A Little Ice Age Fort in Southeastern Alaska,” *American Antiquity* 78 (2013), pp. 3-23.

wampum along its length – the lines symbolizing a separate-but-equal relationship between two entities based on mutual benefit and mutual respect for each party's inherent freedom of movement – neither side may attempt to “steer” the vessel of the other as it travels along its own, self-determined path.⁴ A nineteenth-century French dictionary of the Mohawk language defined the very word for wampum belt (*kahionni*) as a human-made symbol emulating a river, due in part to its linear form and in part to the way in which its constituent shell beads resemble ripples and waves. Just as a navigable water course facilitates mutual relations between nations, thus does *kahionni*, “the river formed by the hand of man”, serve as a sign of “alliance, concord, and friendship” that links “divergent spirits” and provides a “bond between hearts”.⁵

Contemporary Haudenosaunee oral tradition identifies the original elaboration of *kaswentha* relations between Iroquois nations and Europeans with a *circa* 1613 agreement negotiated between Mohawks and a Dutch trader named Jacob Eelckens at Tawagonshi, as a precursor to the formal establishment of Dutch Fort Nassau at nearby Normans Kill.⁶ For more

⁴ Richard Hill, Sr., “Oral Memory of the Haudenosaunee: Views of the Two Row Wampum,” *Northeast Indian Quarterly* 7 (1990), pp. 21–30; Howard R. Berman, “Perspectives on American Indian Sovereignty and International Law, 1600 to 1776,” in Oren R. Lyons and John C. Mohawk (eds.), *Exiled in the Land of the Free: Democracy, Indian Nations, and the U.S. Constitution* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Clear Light Publishers, 1992), p. 135. For visual representations of “Two Row” belts, see George G. Heye, “Wampum Collection,” Heye Foundation *Indian Notes* 7 (1930), pp. 320–1; Tehanetorens, *Wampum Belts* (Ohsweken, Ont.: Irocrafts, 1983), pp. 10–11.

⁵ J.-A. Cuoq, *Lexique de la Langue Iroquois avec Notes et Appendices* (Montréal, 1882), pp. 160–1. Thanks to Darren Bonaparte for drawing this reference to my attention. See also J.N.B. Hewitt, “Wampum,” in Frederick Webb Hodge (ed.), *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 30 (2 vols., Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1907–10) 2:908; Michael K. Foster, “Another Look at the Function of Wampum in Iroquois-White Councils,” in Francis Jennings et al (eds.), *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy: An Interdisciplinary Guide to the Treaties of the Six Nations and Their League* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985), pp. 99–114 at 109; David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 131.

⁶ E.B. O’Callaghan and Berthold Fernow (eds.), *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* [15 vols., Albany, 1853–87 (hereafter NYCD)] 1:79–80; J. Franklin Jameson (ed.), *Narratives of New Netherland, 1609–1664* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959 [1909]), pp. 47–8; Peter Wraaxall, *An Abridgment of the Indian Affairs Contained in Four Folio Volumes, Transacted in the Colony of New York, from the Year 1678 to the Year 1751*, C.H. McIlwain (ed.), (Cambridge, Mass., 1915) (hereafter “WA”), p. 95; Jonathan W. Hasbrouck, “The Silver Covenant Chain,” *Olde Ulster: An Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 4 (1908), p. 3; Jan Kupp, “Dutch Influences in Canada,” *de Halve Maen* 56, no. 2 (1981), pp. 14–16 at 15; Charles Gehring and William A. Starna, “Dutch and Indians in the Hudson Valley: The Early Period,”

than a century, and with increasing frequency since 1989, Haudenosaunee leaders, activists, and scholars have consistently and explicitly asserted the historical veracity of *kaswentha* and the Two Row Belt as foundational to their understanding of early colonial-era cross-cultural negotiations governed by mutual respect, reciprocity, and renewal. From the standpoint of the Haudenosaunee, the *kaswentha* relationship embodies one of interdependence: the two parties to the agreement may share the same space while retaining, as Anishinaabe political theorist Dale Turner has pointed out, their status as “distinct political entities”. Put another way, *kaswentha* makes manifest the joint decision by two parties to remain independent together. The most recent Haudenosaunee articulations of the *kaswentha* tradition point to the utility of its message as a model for repairing indigenous-settler relations in contemporary North America.⁷

Hudson Valley Regional Review 9, no. 2 (1992), pp. 1-25 at 13; Cornelius Jaenen, “Champlain and the Dutch,” in Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois (eds.), *Champlain: The Birth of French America* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), p. 241; Otto, *Dutch-Munsee Encounter in America*, pp. 54-5, 61-2, 70; Starna, “Retrospecting the Origins of the League of the Iroquois,” pp. 305-308.

⁷ For evidence of the Two Row tradition circa 1870-1989, see Foster, “Another Look at the Function of Wampum,” p. 112n8; Paul Williams and Curtis Nelson, “Kaswentha,” in *For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Research Reports: Treaties (Project Area 1, “Early Treaty Making in Canada”) (CD-ROM, Ottawa, Ont.: Libraxus, 1997), pp. 91-5, 129, 402; Kathryn V. Muller, “Holding Hands With Wampum: Haudenosaunee Council Fires from the Great Law of Peace to Contemporary Relationships with the Canadian State” (Ph.D. dissertation, Queen’s University, 2008), chs. 5-6; Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign, “Historic Controversy?” <http://honorthetworow.org/?p=787> (accessed 19 February 2013); Hill, Sr., “Between the Two Rows: Reflecting on the Linked Vessels,” (paper presented at the American Indian Program 30th Anniversary and Two Row Wampum Renewal Conference, Cornell University, 12 April 2013). For evidence of Haudenosaunee recitations since 1989, see Michael Mitchell, “An Unbroken Assertion of Sovereignty,” in Boyce Richardson (ed.), *Drumbeat: Anger and Renewal in Indian Country* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1989), pp. 109-110; Francis Boots Ateronhiakaton, “Iroquoian Use of Wampum,” in Joseph Bruchac (ed.), *New Voices from the Longhouse: An Anthology of Contemporary Iroquois Writing* (Greenfield Center, N.Y.: Greenfield Review Press, 1989), 37-8; Hill, Sr., “Oral Memory of the Haudenosaunee”; Oren Lyons, “The American Indian in the Past,” in Lyons and John C. Mohawk (eds.), *Exiled in the Land of the Free: Democracy, Indian Nations, and the U.S. Constitution* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Clear Light Publishers, 1992), pp. 40-2; Robert A. Williams, Jr., *Linking Arms Together: American Indian Treaty Visions of Law and Peace, 1600-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 4-5; Doug George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois Culture and Commentary* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000), pp. 118-21; James W. Ransom and Kreg T. Ettenger, “Polishing the Kaswentha: A Haudenosaunee View of Environmental Cooperation,” *Environmental Science and Policy* 4 (2001), pp. 219-28 at 222; Deborah Doxtator, “Inclusive and Exclusive Perceptions of Difference: Native and Euro-Based Concepts of Time, History, and Change,” Germaine Warkentin and Carolyn

In contrast, non-Native historians of the Haudenosaunee have been at considerable pains since 1985 to dismiss the idea of *kaswentha* and/or the Two Row Belt as legitimate historical phenomena. Francis Jennings' edited volume, *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, widely regarded as the standard scholarly reference on Iroquois diplomacy, contains no mention of *kaswentha*, only a statement questioning the authenticity of a document purporting to represent the 1613 "treaty of friendship" often identified as the original agreement underlying all subsequent Two Row diplomacy.⁸ In 1987, three scholars authored an article that established a "parchment" document purporting to represent the 1613 Tawagonshi Treaty as a twentieth century forgery. This argument has been restated energetically in 2012 in an effort to discredit contemporary commemorations of the Two Row

Podruchny (eds.), *Decentering the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500-1700* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 46-7; Irving Powless, Jr., "Treaty Making," in G. Peter Jemison and Anna M. Schein (eds.), *Treaty of Canandaigua 1794: 200 Years of Treaty Relations between the Iroquois Confederacy and the United States* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2002), p. 23; Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasasé: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2005), p. 266; Joyce Tekahnawiiaks King, "The Value of Water and the Meaning of Water Law for the Native Americans Known as the Haudenosaunee," *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* 16, no. 3 (2007), pp. 459-65; Salli M. Kawennotakie Benedict, "Made in Akwesasne," in James V. Wright and Jean-Luc Pilon (eds.), *A Passion for the Past: Papers in Honour of James F. Pendergast*, Canadian Museum of Civilization Mercury Series 164 (Gatineau, Qué., 2004), pp. 435–53 at 441-2; Onondaga Nation, "Wampum – Guswenta – Two Row Wampum Belt," http://www.onondaganation.org/culture/wpm_tworow.html (accessed 7 December 2012). For suggestions of the utility of *kaswentha* as a model for repairing indigenous-settler relations, see James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 135-6; Robert Vachon, "Guswenta, Or, The Intercultural Imperative: Towards a Re-Enacted Peace Accord between the Mohawk Nation and the North American Nation-States and Their Peoples," *Interculture* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1995): pp. 1-73; 28, no.3 (Summer 1995): pp. 2-41; 28, no.4 (Fall 1995): pp. 2-46; Jeff Lambe, "Relational Boundaries: *Kaswentha* and Inter-Group Relations," in Jill Oakes (ed.), *Aboriginal Cultural Landscapes* (Winnipeg: Aboriginal Issues Press, 2004), pp. 22-34; Dale Turner, *This Is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 47-56 (quote p. 54); Paula Sherman, "Picking Up the Wampum Belt as an Act of Protest," in Lynne Davis (ed.), *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous/Non-Indigenous Relationships* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 114-30; Thohahoken Michael Doxtater, "Tutelo Heights Short-Term 'Two Row' Lessons Central to Long-Term Mediation in the Grand River Valley," *Wicazo Sa Review* 26 (Spring 2011), pp. 43-65.

⁸ Jennings et al (eds.), *History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, p. 158 (quote), p. 226. This book was reissued in paperback by the same publisher in 1995. See also Allen W. Trelease, *Indian Affairs in Colonial New York: the Seventeenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 34. The disputed document was first published in L.G. Van Loon, "Tawagonshi: Beginning of the Treaty Era," *Indian Historian* 1, no. 3 (Summer 1968), pp. 22-6.

agreement. As they put it: “A fake treaty document [...] is about to be celebrated.”⁹ A 2007 article in the *American Indian Quarterly* not only dismissed the idea of the Two Row (as manifested in a repatriated wampum belt) as a nineteenth-century “verbalization” of “an ancient assumption of autonomy” by Haudenosaunee people residing in Canada for contemporary political purposes, but also went so far as to warn contemporary Haudenosaunee litigants against employing the concepts associated with the Two Row treaty in support of any “political claim” in court given its supposedly “perplexing origins” and “ambiguous” status.¹⁰ Finally, the most recent book-length study of early Native American diplomacy with European settlers in the Hudson River Valley eschews any mention of Eelckens or the *kaswentha* relationship, arguing instead that political negotiations between the Dutch and neighboring indigenous nations did not begin until circa 1640.¹¹

Leaving aside the outright omission of *kaswentha* from the first and last examples cited above, the two intervening non-Native critiques are

⁹ Charles Th. Gehring, William A. Starna, and William N. Fenton, “The Tawagonshi Treaty of 1613: The Final Chapter,” *New York History* 60 (1987), pp. 373–93; *idem*, “Revisiting the Fake Tawagonshi Treaty of 1613,” *New York History* 93 (2012), pp. 95–101. In addition to the use of “fake” in the title of the 2012 publication, Starna referred to the document in January 2013 as “an obviously phony record that is as worthless as the infamous Hitler diaries” and argued against the contribution of public monies to the Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign, which he characterized as “based on a fake.” See James M. Odato, “Is Wampum Proof of Deal? Dispute Over Existence of Treaty Centers on Symbolic Belt of Beads” *Albany Times-Union*, 1 January 2013. Compare Vernon Benjamin’s critique, “The Tawagonshi Agreement of 1613: A Chain of Friendship in the Dutch Hudson Valley,” *Hudson Valley Regional Review* 16, no. (1999), pp. 1–20.

¹⁰ Muller, “The Two ‘Mystery’ Belts of Grand River: A Biography of the Two Row Wampum and the Friendship Belt,” *American Indian Quarterly* 31 (2007), pp. 129–64 (quotes at 131, 152, 153). Muller’s subsequent dissertation (cited above, n. 5) notably scaled back some of the more heated rhetoric contained in the 2007 article, but still argued that the “discourse of an autonomous canoe and ship” represented a post-1867 innovation on the part of Haudenosaunee leaders in Canada, who employed the ostensibly novel idea of the Two Row wampum belt to combat unprecedented assimilationist policy initiatives on the part of the Canadian federal government; see “Holding Hands With Wampum”, pp. 141–63 (quote at 144), 240. On the nature of the Canadian government’s legislative threat to the historical legacy of partnership with indigenous nations and to any concept of “home rule to protect and encourage the development of a valued and variant culture” for Native communities, see John S. Milloy, “The Early Indian Acts: Developmental Strategy and Constitutional Change”, in Ian A.L. Getty and Antoine S. Lussier (eds.), *As Long as the Sun Shines and Water Flows: A Reader in Canadian Native Studies* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), pp. 56–64 at 63.

¹¹ Tom Arne Midtrød, *The Memory of All Ancient Customs: Native American Diplomacy in the Colonial Hudson Valley* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), pp. 15–18.

noteworthy not only for their effort to foreclose any further discussion of *kaswentha*, but also for the ways in which they approach the problem of authenticating *kaswentha* as an historical concept. Gehring and Starna concentrate on the very beginning of recorded documentation of the Two Row agreement, dismiss a single problematic text as a “fraud”, and undertake no further investigation of the question. Muller’s study focuses on the latter end of recorded documentation, employing a discussion of twentieth-century Haudenosaunee efforts to repatriate several wampum belts obtained by private collectors during the nineteenth century and proceeds backwards in historical time until circa 1870, concluding that in lieu of any documented association between a surviving, physical Two Row wampum belt and written evidence of the “innate understanding” of its message of autonomy, non-Native scholars must disregard *kaswentha* as a historically valid expression of Haudenosaunee social, political, and/or economic relations with settler colonies. Absence of evidence, in other words, is taken by Muller as evidence of *kaswentha*’s absence, yet she does not attempt a comprehensive examination of sources created prior to 1870.

What happens when we explore the documentary record that falls *between* these two chronological benchmarks of 1613 and 1870? Can we align evidence from written sources with the substantial body of Haudenosaunee oral tradition concerning the Two Row agreement? Undertaking such an exercise reveals substantial documentation in support of Haudenosaunee oral tradition concerning *kaswentha* that attests to its deeply-rooted character in Haudenosaunee cultural understandings of the past.

Haudenosaunee speakers explicitly mentioned or recited the *kaswentha* tradition for Anglo-American and French colonial audiences on at least fifteen different occasions between 1656 and 1744. Additionally, William Johnson, an Irish-American fur trader who served the colony of New York as an Indian agent and in 1756 ascended to the Crown-appointed office of Superintendent of Indian Affairs recited the tradition on two subsequent occasions in 1748 and 1755 (see Appendix for transcriptions of these recitations), and a brief version of the tradition appeared in New York Council member Archibald Kennedy’s 1751 pamphlet, *The Importance of Gaining and Preserving the Friendship of the Indians to the British Interest Considered*.¹² While the fullest single written source that corroborates the early seventeenth-century origins of a *kaswentha* relationship between Iroquois nations and the Dutch appears in the 27 June 1689 speech by a

¹² Archibald Kennedy, *The Importance of Gaining and Preserving the Friendship of the Indians to the British Interest Considered* (New York, 1751), pp. 5–6.

delegation of Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Oneida headmen before the magistrates of Albany, the documentary evidence, considered in the aggregate, reveals a striking degree of consistency over time in the expression of fundamental principles of the *kaswentha* tradition by Haudenosaunee speakers. In June 1742, one such speaker noted proudly that the origin of the Covenant Chain alliance would never be forgotten because it was “wrote down in our heads.” Beyond simply documenting the retention of the “terms and conditions” of the agreement in Haudenosaunee “Oral Tradition”, careful review of the record indicates that non-Native authorities recognized those conditions and embraced the metaphors associated with the Two Row agreement.¹³

The idea of the origins of a covenant or alliance with “Jacques,” the Dutch, or “Christians” in generic terms, appears in all fifteen documented Haudenosaunee recitations circa 1656-1744 (the 1678, 1689, and 1691 recitations make explicit mention of an individual named Jacques). Dating of the original agreement prior to circa 1620 finds support in the 1701 recitation, in which Haudenosaunee delegates described their original agreement with the Dutch occurring “above eighty years” prior to that date, and in 1744 Onondaga headman Canasatego dated the origin of the relationship to “above One Hundred Years Ago”. Johnson’s versions emphasize (unsurprisingly) the Anglo-Iroquois phase of the agreement that originated in 1664: his 1755 recitation noted that the relationship had existed for “almost 100 years.”

The evolution over time of the media linking the Haudenosaunee to European newcomers from a piece of tree bark or rope to an “iron chain” and eventually to a “silver” and/or “covenant” chain may be discerned in all of the Haudenosaunee recitations (save for 1743) and this transformation is also present in each of the three documented European renderings post-dating 1748.¹⁴ Explicit associations of the agreement with the concept of mutual security, reciprocal obligations, or brotherhood appear in eleven of the fifteen Haudenosaunee recitations (1656, 1678, 1689, 1691, May 1694, 1698, 1700, 1722, 1723, 1737, and 1744) and in each of the three European-authored versions.¹⁵ Nine of the fifteen Haudenosaunee recitations make

¹³ NYCD 6:218 (“wrote down in...”), 444 (all other quotes).

¹⁴ See also New York Governor William Burnet’s 20 September 1724 speech to a delegation of Haudenosaunee headmen at Albany in which he referred to “a Tree planted by the former Govrs. [of New York] for you to shelter under that you might live Plentifully and increase under the shadow of it” (NYCD 5:723).

¹⁵ See also an unnamed Haudenosaunee speaker’s description of Albany as a “fixed and settled place of Peace and Tranquility” in a 17 September 1724 speech at Albany

specific associations of their European alliance partners with a ship or sailing vessel (1678, 1689, 1691, May 1694, August 1694, 1722, 1723, 1737, and 1744) and this is echoed in the 1748 Johnson and 1751 Kennedy accounts. A significant indication of the agreement's endorsement by the League as a whole is found in the pre-eminent role assumed by Onondaga leaders (hosts of annual meetings of League headmen) in relating the *kaswentha* tradition before European audiences, as indicated by five of the fifteen Haudenosaunee recitations (1678, August 1694, 1698, 1700, and 1744). Four of the fifteen Haudenosaunee recitations make mention of trade as a foundational element of the relationship (1691, 1698, 1700, and 1744) and this theme is also present in the 1748 and 1751 European versions.¹⁶ Three of the Haudenosaunee recitations (1656, 1722, and 1744) associate the agreement directly with wampum belts, and Johnson punctuated his 1748 recitation with a "large Belt of Wampum". Exchanges of wampum belts also occurred commonly in association with renewals of the alliance at treaty negotiations in which neither Iroquois nor New York authorities were recorded making explicit recitations of the *kaswentha* tradition. On two such occasions the sources refer to a "Chain Belt," but no documented example provides a specific correlation with a Two Row-patterned belt.¹⁷

The lack of any specific association between the conceptual underpinnings of *kaswentha* and a Two Row Belt in the documented recitations of the tradition is striking, but ultimately less significant an issue than it may appear at first glance. Descriptions of wampum belts in documentary sources, particularly from the early period of contact, are notoriously vague. Additionally, wampum belts are susceptible to physical deterioration over time (notably pointed out in Canasatego's 1744 recitation of the tradition), and we must also consider the extensive loss and disassembly of belts conveyed by Haudenosaunee representatives to non-Native recipients.

(*NYCD* 5:717), Burnet's 9 September 1726 reference to the "Matt" laid down at Albany "which has always been kept clean for us to meet upon" (*ibid.*, 791), and an unnamed Haudenosaunee speaker's description of Albany as "the place in which our forefathers were wont to transact all affairs of peace and friendship" (*ibid.*, 6:218).

¹⁶ See also New York Governor George Clinton's description of trade as "one great end and purpose" of the Covenant Chain alliance in a 6 July 1751 speech at Albany (*NYCD* 6:717).

¹⁷ For examples of renewals of the Covenant Chain alliance involving exchanges of wampum belts but without recitations of the *kaswentha* tradition, see Minutes of the Albany Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1723-1755 (3 vols., National Archives of Canada. Record Group 10, vols. 1819-21), 1:336, 337a-8; 2:71, 73; *NYCD* 5:715, 717, 723, 792, 795, 861-2, 964, 967; 6:174, 176, 217, 218, 263, 265, 317-18 ("Chain Belt," p. 318), 321, 442, 444, 717 ("Chain Belt"), 718-19. See also n. 32 below.

Ethnographic evidence also indicates that wampum belts were occasionally taken apart and the beads repurposed by the Haudenosaunee themselves.¹⁸ Given these issues, we may ask at what point in time Haudenosaunee people possessed the capacity to produce a Two Row Belt.

¹⁸ Nancy Davis, "Conservation of Archaeological Shell Artifacts," in Charles F. Hayes III, Lynn Ceci, and Connie Cox Bodner (eds.), *Proceedings of the 1986 Shell Bead Conference: Selected Papers Rochester Museum and Science Center Research Records 20* (Rochester, NY, 1989), pp. 13-16; James Folts, "Before the Dispersal: Records of New York's Official Records with the Oneidas and Other Indian Nations," in Laurence M. Hauptman and L. Gordon McLester III (eds.), *The Oneida Indian Journey: From New York to Wisconsin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), pp. 151-70 at 153; Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*, p. 132; William N. Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), p. 235-6, 576; Jonathan C. Lainey, *La "Monnaie" des Sauvages: Les Colliers de Wampum d'hier à aujourd'hui* (Sillery, QC: Les Éditions du Septentrion, 2004), pp. 79-86; Landsman, "Anthropology, Theory, and Research in Iroquois Studies," p. 256; Becker, "Wampum Held by the Oneida Indian Nation, Inc. of New York: Research Relating to Wampum Cuffs and Belts," *Bulletin: Journal of the New York State Archaeological Association* 123 (2007), pp. 1-18 at 4, 13; *idem*, "Small Wampum Bands Used by Native Americans in the Northeast: Functions and Recycling," *Material Culture* 40 (2008), pp. 1-17 at 8. Cf. Williams, "Reading Wampum Belts as Living Symbols," *Northeast Indian Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1990), pp. 31-5 at 34-5, who acknowledges the disassembly of certain belts but asserts that "permanent commitments" such as the "Two Row Wampum" were likely preserved. Muller describes a wampum belt displayed by a Haudenosaunee delegation at the Long Island Historical Society in late March 1864 while en route to Washington, D.C. as a Two Row belt (see "Holding Hands With Wampum", pp. 170-171), but a description of the belt in a contemporary newspaper account does not support this contention. See "Long Island Historical Society: Indian Legends – The Red Man's Theory of Creation, Babel, Confederacy and Treaties – The Long Island Braves – Wampum Presented to the Iroquois by President Washington," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 25 March 1864, p. 2. One possible candidate for a preserved Two Row belt is the so-called "Path Belt" [woven in an unmistakable Two Row pattern and referred to in those terms by Fenton (*Great Law and the Longhouse*, p. 234)] that was acquired under vague circumstances by Beauchamp at an unspecified date between 1898 and 1901, purchased by the New York State Museum in 1949, and eventually repatriated to the Onondaga Nation in October 1989; William Martin Beauchamp, *Wampum and Shell Articles used by the New York Indians* (Albany: University of the State of New York Press, 1901), p. 406; Charles H. Gillette, "Wampum Beads and Belts," *Indian Historian* 3 (Fall 1970), pp. 33-8 at 36; William N. Fenton, "The New York State Wampum Collection: The Case for the Integrity of Cultural Treasures," *American Philosophical Society Proceedings* 115, no. 6 (1971), pp. 437-61 at p. 458; [Anonymous] "Wampum Belts Returned to the Onondaga Nation," *Man in the Northeast* 38 (1989), 109-17 (esp. Fig. 12, p. 117); Jose Barreiro, "Return of the Wampum," *Northeast Indian Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1990), pp. 8-20 at 12; Martin Sullivan, "Return of the Sacred Wampum Belts of the Iroquois," *History Teacher* 26 (November 1992), pp. 7-14; Christopher N. Matthews and Kurt A. Jordan, "Secularism as Ideology: Exploring Assumptions of Cultural Equivalence in Museum Repatriation," in Reinhard Berbeck and Randall H. McGuire (eds.), *Ideologies in Archaeology* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), pp. 214-29. For an example of a study of a surviving Iroquois wampum belt linked to a documentary source, see "Historic Wampum," *Buffalo Historical Society Publications* 25 (1921), 208-13.

The technological needs for the production of a patterned belt with geometrical designs or representational imagery would include: 1) short tubular white shell beads (a.k.a. “wampum”), 2) a method of weaving that permitted side-to-side stringing of those tubular beads, and 3) dark-colored tubular beads (either purple wampum made from the shell of the quahog clam [*Mercenaria mercenaria*], dark-colored tubular glass beads obtained in trade with Europeans, or the use of a pigment to color appropriate sections of a monochrome [white] belt) for the production of patterned belts with geometrical designs or other representational imagery. Recent archaeological studies indicate that Haudenosaunee production of a recognizable Two Row Belt would indeed have been possible circa 1613 or very shortly thereafter. The presence of white shell wampum, as described above, is well-documented at Iroquois sites after the mid-sixteenth-century.¹⁹ Side-to-side stringing of tubular beads cut from European sheet brass is noted at the Seneca Culbertson site, occupied circa 1575–90, and early evidence of wampum woven into small objects dates from the turn of the seventeenth century.²⁰ The availability of tubular purple wampum in 1613 is a matter of debate among scholars owing to the perceived need for European-supplied iron drills in the manufacturing process, but examples have been found at the Seneca Fugle site (occupied circa 1605–25).²¹ Flat discoidal beads rendered in purple and white shell appear at the Mohawk Klock site (occupied

¹⁹ James W. Bradley, “Re-visiting Wampum and Other Seventeenth-Century Shell Games,” *Archaeology of Eastern North America* 39 (2011), pp. 25–51 at 31. Mohawk linguistic evidence establishes the association of the noun root for wampum with a device to fulfill certain societal functions to the precontact era. See Gunther Michelson, “Iroquoian Terms for Wampum,” *International Journal of American Linguistics* 57 (1991), pp. 108–16 at 115.

²⁰ Charles F. Wray et al., *The Adams and Culbertson Sites, Rochester Museum and Science Center Research Records* No.19 (Rochester, N.Y., 1987), p. 52, Figure 3-19; Lynn Ceci, “Native Wampum as a Peripheral Resource in the Seventeenth-Century World System,” in Laurence M. Hauptman and James D. Wherry (eds.), *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), pp. 48–63 at 53; Marshall Becker, “A Wampum Belt Chronology: Origins to Modern Times,” *Northeast Anthropology* 63 (Spring 2002), pp. 49–70 at 50.

²¹ Martha L. Sempowski and Lorraine Saunders, *Dutch Hollow and Factory Hollow: The Advent of Dutch Trade Among the Seneca Rochester Museum and Science Center Research Records* No. 24 (Rochester, NY, 2001), p. 722. On wampum manufacture, see Elizabeth S. Peña, “Wampum Production in New Netherland and Colonial New England: The Historical and Archaeological Context” (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1990), pp. 23–9; Fenton, *Great Law and the Longhouse*, pp. 225–6; Matthew Lesniak, “New Evidence of Wampum Use and Production From Albany, New York,” in Charles L. Fisher (ed.), *People, Places, and Material Things: Historical Archaeology of Albany, New York State Museum Bulletin* 499 (Albany, N.Y.: The University of the State of New York, State Education Department, 2003), p. 129.

circa 1560-80), which may signal the origins of two-color mnemonics in bead usage (albeit in strung rather than woven format).²² Purple discoidal beads likely represented the conceptual precursor to the tubular purple wampum beads known to exist in significant quantity after 1630.²³ Establishing the possibility of a Two Row Belt's existence circa 1613 is not the same as direct evidence of association, but given that archaeological recovery does not necessarily represent an expression of the earliest use of a particular cultural form (valued items may have been reused, kept in circulation, and neither lost nor buried with the dead, or simply remain undiscovered in the archaeological record), and given the increasing significance of wampum as a material form to facilitate communication across cultural boundaries at this precise moment in time, serious consideration of the validity of oral tradition associating the principles of *kaswentha* with the Two Row Belt long before the physical appearance of surviving examples of these belts in the mid-nineteenth century seems warranted.²⁴

Evidence of Haudenosaunee and European recitations of the *kaswentha* tradition indicates clearly that the remarkable durability over time of ideas associated with a Two Row relationship does not depend on the legitimacy of a single document and that Haudenosaunee and contemporary Europeans "verbalized" these ideas long before the late nineteenth century. The eighteen recitations documented from 1656 to 1755 also challenge claims that "the Two Row Wampum's message of independence" post-dated or "grew from the [Anglo-Iroquois] Covenant Chain alliance"

²² Robert E. Funk and Robert D. Kuhn, *Three Sixteenth Century Mohawk Iroquois Village Sites*, *New York State Museum Bulletin* 503 (Albany: University of the State of New York, State Education Department, 2003), p. 44. See also Wayne Lenig to Kurt Jordan, personal electronic mail correspondence dated 17 October 2012 (copy in author's possession). My thanks to Kurt Jordan and Wayne Lenig for sharing this information.

²³ William J. Engelbrecht, *Iroquoia: The Development of a Native World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), p. 156; Ceci, "Native Wampum as a Peripheral Resource," p. 50. Cf. George Hamell, "The Iroquois and the World's Rim: Speculations on Color, Culture, and Contact," *American Indian Quarterly* 16 (1992), pp. 451–70 at 460, who suggests that dark blue glass trade beads available in increasing quantities after the turn of the seventeenth century inspired Iroquois interest in purple tubular shell wampum.

²⁴ Muller, "Holding Hands with Wampum," pp. 141–60; Angela M. Haas, "Wampum as Hypertext: An American Indian Intellectual Tradition of Multimedia Theory and Practice," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 19.4 (2007), pp. 77–100; Elizabeth Hill Boone, "Presidential Lecture: Discourse and Authority in Histories Painted, Knotted, and Threaded," *Ethnohistory* 59 (2012), pp. 225–30. See also the related discussion in Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade: Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595-1674* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 257–75.

(commonly dated from 1677) and demonstrate that the concept of *kaswentha* in fact possesses a strong “historical footing.”²⁵

Beyond the direct evidence represented by the recitations, additional documentary sources amplify our confidence in the deep roots of the fundamental concepts of the *kaswentha* relationship: its beginnings in the early decades of the seventeenth century, its rhetorical framing in terms of an “iron chain” forged and renewed with the Dutch prior to 1664, and its early association with the “ship and canoe” discourse present in the explicit “Two Row” articulations of the tradition that appear after circa 1870. It is important to point out that the while the language of the “chain” connecting the two peoples persisted in recitations of the tradition over time, it never supplanted the “ship and canoe” language characteristic of Haudenosaunee understandings of *kaswentha*. As illustrated in the recitations presented below, the idea of a rope, and later a “chain” of iron, then silver represented a critical component of the tradition that bound the two peoples together in friendship as a necessary precursor to the kind of relationship embodied by two vessels travelling along a parallel route. The latter idea, in other words, related to the former concept – the two were neither incompatible nor mutually exclusive – notwithstanding occasional efforts by Anglo-American authorities to manipulate the metaphor of the “chain” for colonialist purposes.²⁶

Evidence of the antiquity of the *kaswentha* tradition is substantiated by two seventeenth-century public statements: in 1660, Mohawk speakers described their “old friendship” with the Dutch as having existed “for more than thirty years”,²⁷ and in 1699 local Dutch authorities in Albany characterized their alliance with the Iroquois League as so old “that there is none now living that can remember the beginning of it.”²⁸ In September 1659, Mohawk speakers referred to their “first treaty of friendship and brotherhood” with the Dutch as occurring “sixteen years ago” (i.e., in 1643),²⁹ and the 1656 and 1658 recitations (see Appendix) mark clear efforts on the part

²⁵ Cf. Muller, “Two ‘Mystery’ Belts of Grand River,” p. 140 (quotes).

²⁶ Fenton, *Great Law and the Longhouse*, p. 308. Cf. Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies, from its beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1984), pp. 373–5; Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), pp. 136–41.

²⁷ Charles T. Gehring (trans. and ed.), *Fort Orange Court Minutes, 1652-1660* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990) (hereafter *FOCM*), p. 503.

²⁸ *NYCD* 4:568

²⁹ *FOCM*, 457.

of the League to link the government of the colony of New France with the “iron chain” that already connected the Iroquois to the Dutch. In 1641, Mohawk and French negotiators held a water-borne conference in the middle of the St. Lawrence River opposite Trois-Rivières, a literal re-enactment of the meeting symbolized in the oral tradition of *kaswentha*.³⁰ Four years later Mohawk leader Kiotsaeton repeated the theme even more dramatically, appearing opposite Trois-Rivières “in the bow of a Shallop,” with his person “almost completely covered in porcelain beads” (i.e., wampum) to broker a large-scale peace agreement between the Iroquois League, New France, and indigenous nations allied to the French.³¹ Charles E. Orser Jr.’s recent assessment of the Eurocentric attitude of the Dutch settlers of the Upper Hudson Valley circa 1624 to 1664 lends support to the notion of their receptivity to ideas of separate jurisdictional authority bound up in the Haudenosaunee concept of *kaswentha*,³² but the most striking evidence that Europeans were aware of the “ship and canoe” orientation of the *kaswentha* tradition appears in the personal seal devised in 1757 by Sir William Johnson and employed during his tenure as British Superintendent of Indian Affairs (possibly until 1770) as a means of certifying written “testimonials” offered to allied nations as documentation of their formal ties to the Crown [see Figure 1]. Among the several images contained in the seal are a European sailing ship and a Native-paddled canoe, depicted in parallel. Significantly, the first recorded distribution of a sealed testimonial in August 1757 indicates that Johnson renewed the “ancient covenant chain” and “gave the Cov’t Chain Belt [of] 16 Rows” just prior to releasing the testimonial to Native recipients.³³

Finally, we may assess the survival of the core principles of the *kaswentha* tradition in colonial-era Haudenosaunee treaty diplomacy. While space does not permit a comprehensive examination of such a voluminous archive, we may nevertheless profit from an examination of two key agreements that occurred near opposite ends of its chronological spectrum: the

³⁰ Reuben G. Thwaites (ed.), *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791* (73 vols. Cleveland, O.: Burrows Brothers, 1896-1901) (hereafter *JR*), 21:55.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 27:247; Jennings et al, *History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, pp. 127-53.

³² Charles E. Orser Jr., “An Archaeology of Eurocentrism,” *American Antiquity* 77, no. 4 (2012), pp. 745-50. See also Jaap Jacobs, *New Netherland: A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth Century America* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 398-9.

³³ James L. Sullivan et al (eds.), *The Papers of Sir William Johnson* (14 vols., Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1921-1965) (hereafter *WJP*) 3:187; 7: pp. 494-5, 658; 9:814 (quotes); 13:98 (circa 1898 artist’s reproduction of the seal; the original document burned in the Albany State Capitol fire of 1911).

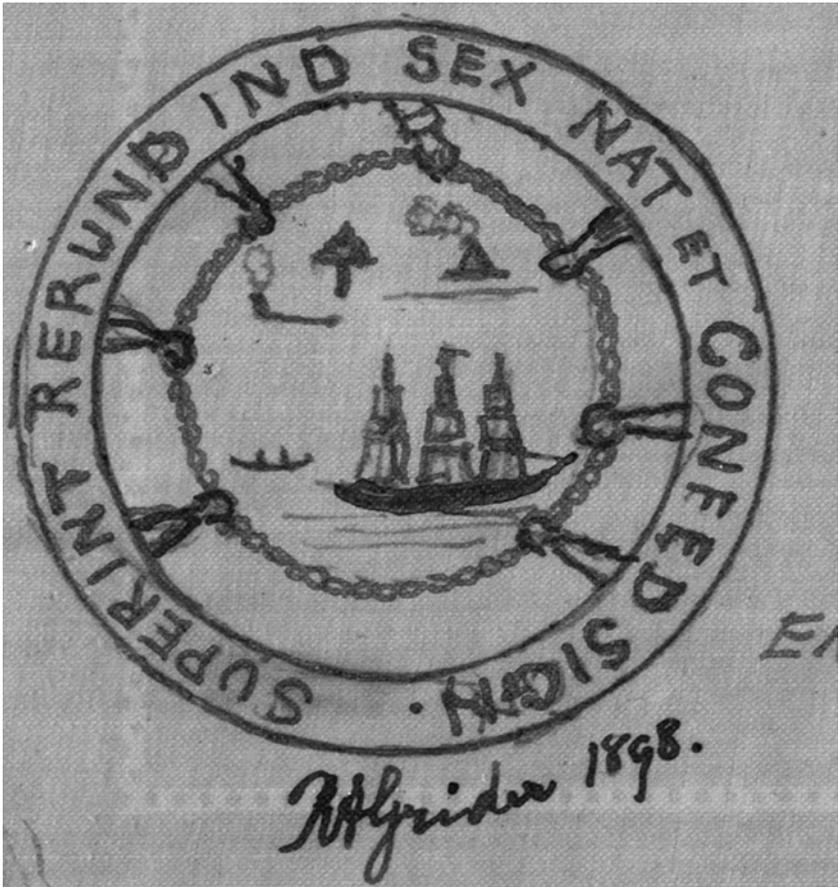


Fig. 1. Seal of Sir William Johnson, 1757 to *circa* 1770

1664 “Cartwright” treaty between the English and Haudenosaunee delegates, and the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua between the Haudenosaunee and the United States. Less than three weeks following the formal surrender of New Netherland by the Dutch to the English in September 1664, a delegation of headmen from all of the League’s constituent nations arrived at the former site of Fort Orange (now “Fort Albany”), to confer with newly arrived English officials. George Cartwright and Richard Nicolls, treating on behalf of the Duke of York, offered the Haudenosaunee favorable terms of peace and alliance: they would have “wares and commodities” from the

English in quantities and at prices equivalent to those of the former Dutch regime; additionally, English officials pledged to punish any offense committed by the settler population of New York against “Indyan princes or their subjects” throughout “all other English Plantations” in North America, provided that Haudenosaunee “sachems” agreed to undertake investigation, punishment, and arrangements for compensation for any crimes committed by their people. In their reply, the Haudenosaunee delegates accepted these terms and added *kaswentha*-style provisions asserting their right to free trade with other nations of their choosing, and committing the English to non-interference in Iroquois wars with other Native nations. Legal scholar Paul Williams has described these terms as tantamount to “separate personal criminal jurisdiction”, or validation of the right of each signatory to retain control over its citizenry in internal matters. A significant thread of Mohawk oral tradition associates the origin of the Two Row Belt with this specific treaty.³⁴

The Treaty of Canandaigua represented an effort by the United States to redress Haudenosaunee grievances concerning loss of lands following the American Revolutionary War and to offer significant concessions to the Haudenosaunee to prevent the latter from joining in the active military resistance against the United States undertaken by Native nations residing in the upper Great Lakes and Ohio River valley regions. The Treaty of Canandaigua confirmed a direct relationship between the Haudenosaunee and the executive branch of the United States government, promised federal protection of Haudenosaunee lands, created a dispute resolution mechanism, clarified each party’s jurisdiction, and promoted peace. Williams and Nelson point out the consistency of *kaswentha* principles over time in

³⁴ Peter R. Christoph and Florence A. Christoph (eds.), *Books of General Entries of the Colony of New York*, vol.1, *Orders, Warrants, Letters, Commissions, Passes and Licenses Issued by Governors Richard Nicolls and Francis Lovelace, 1664-1673* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 47-9; compare NYCD 3:8. A significant thread of Mohawk oral tradition locates the origins of the Two Row wampum belt symbolizing the *kaswentha* to the 1664 Cartwright Treaty; Paul Williams, “The Chain” (LL.M. thesis, York University, 1992), pp. 96-8 (quote at 97); *idem*, “Wampum of the Six Nations Confederacy at the Grand River Territory: 1784-1986,” in Charles F. Hayes III and Ceci (eds.), *Proceedings of the 1986 Shell Bead Conference: Selected Papers Rochester Museum and Science Center Research Records* No.20 (Rochester, NY, 1989), pp. 200-202; Patricia Monture-Angus, *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations Independence* (Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing, 1999), p. 39; John R. Miller, “Compact, Contract, Covenant: The Evolution of Indian Treaty-Making,” in Ted Binnema and Susan Neylan (eds.), *New Histories for Old: Changing Perspectives on Canada’s Native Pasts* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), pp. 66-91 at 74. For evidence of nineteenth century Ojibwa oral tradition (pre-Canadian Confederation) of the use of a Two Row wampum belt at the 1764 Treaty of Niagara, see John Borrows,

the Treaty of Canandaigua's separation of legal jurisdictions and confirmation of how the two governments were to resolve conflicts.³⁵

Kaswentha relations were not static – they evolved over time as ties between the Iroquois and the Dutch (and the latter's English and American successors) deepened and sociopolitical circumstances grew more complex – but they did exist. Indeed, this case study suggests strongly that it is incumbent upon all scholars considering the historicity of indigenous (not only Haudenosaunee) oral traditions (especially regarding something as fundamentally significant as *kaswentha*), to do more than simply identify a single document as a fake, or to set the bar for evidentiary proof of a concept's existence to practically impossible standards – such as requiring a surviving “physical” Two Row belt from the colonial era that can be explicitly associated with a documentary source. Given the obvious circumstances of the settler majority population's control of the archives and the structural disinterest of settler nation-states in documenting the distinct and divergent visions of law informing traditions of resistance and opposition among colonized peoples, we may ask why it is so difficult to accept the possibility that Haudenosaunee “traditionalists who speak confidently of agreements that their forebears entered into may be better custodians of the spirit of history than we later Americans who remain preoccupied with the written record”?³⁶

One of the primary means by which settler colonialism sustains itself is through the denial of the authenticity or the antiquity of indigenous traditions or both. Eurocentric scholarship, in adopting these approaches, works to conflate contemporaneous cultural and political differences between indigenous and settler nations into temporal sequence – shorn of a “true” or “authentic” past, the indigenous nation is placed in an inferior position, “behind” in terms of its cultural development and thus susceptible to the demands of the colonizing mission. Mohawk legal scholar Joyce Tekahnawiiaks King adds a further salient point regarding the difficulties contemporary Haudenosaunee nations face in contending with voting democracies in the United States and Canada: as each new settler regime leaves behind the policies of its predecessor, it tends to forget the agreements and lessons

“Wampum at Niagara: The Royal Proclamation, Canadian Legal History, and Self-Government,” in Michael Asch, ed., *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equality, and Respect for Difference* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 163–65, 263n78.

³⁵ Jemison and Schein, *Treaty of Canandaigua 1794*, pp. 295–305; Fenton, *Great Law and the Longhouse*, pp. 622–706; Williams and Nelson, “Kaswentha,” p. 317.

³⁶ Fenton, *Great Law and the Longhouse*, pp. 623–4 (quote); Williams, *Linking Arms Together*, pp. 12–13.

of the past, thereby placing the burdens of preserving memory and promoting education regarding the terms of those agreements on Haudenosaunee leaders.³⁷

Non-Native historians are only beginning to recognize the value of indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing to their research.³⁸ This case study suggests that an effort to reconcile the documentary record with indigenous tradition enables us to move beyond not only arguments that seek to discredit or delegitimize Native peoples' perspectives but also facile and unsatisfying conclusions regarding multiple ways of knowing about or remembering the past. It is worth noting in this context that the very concept of *kaswentha* facilitates a fuller recognition of the simultaneous coexistence of others with their own historical trajectories, their own political priorities, and their own stories to tell. Analyzing the historicity of *kaswentha* raises our awareness of an Iroquois understanding of cross-cultural relationships that works towards unity – not uniformity – by demonstrating how differences between individuals, communities, and nations have to be acknowledged and integrated, rather than annihilated or absorbed.

³⁷ King, "Value of Water", p. 461.

³⁸ Peter Nabokov, *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Claudio Saunt, "Telling Stories: The Political Uses of Myth and History in the Cherokee and Creek Nations," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 3 (2006), pp. 673-97; Steven C. Hahn, "The Cussita Migration Legend: History, Ideology, and the Politics of Mythmaking," in Thomas J. Pluckhahn and Robbie Ethridge (eds.), *Light on the Path: The Anthropology and History of the Southeastern Indians* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), pp. 57-93; Keith Thor Carlson, "Reflections on Indigenous History and Memory: Reconstructing and Reconsidering Contact," in John Sutton Lutz (ed.), *Myth and Memory: Stories of Indigenous-European Contact* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), pp. 47-8; Matt Hooley, "The Autoethnography of William Whipple Warren," *Wicazo Sa Review* 27.2 (2012), pp. 75-98; Christine M. DeLucia, "The Memory Frontier: Uncommon Pursuits of Past and Place in the Northeast After King Philip's War," *Journal of American History* 98 (2012), pp. 994-6.

Appendix: Recitations of *Kaswentha*, 1656-1755 (all dates N.S.)

26 April 1656

Speaker(s): Mohawk

Location: Trois-Rivières

A Mohawk speaker referred to “a great collar of Porcelain beads” as an “iron chain, larger around than the trees that grow in our forests, which shall bind the Dutch, the French, and the Agnieronnons together,” and stated that “the thunder and lightning of heaven shall never break that chain.” Any “misfortune” to occur between French and Mohawks would be mutually condoled or resolved.³⁹

4 February 1658

Speaker(s): Mohawk

Location: Montréal

The Mohawks claimed to be “united” with Dutch “by a chain of iron” and sought to “make Onontio [ceremonial title for the Governor of New France] enter that union.”⁴⁰

3 October 1678

Speaker(s): Onondaga

Location: Albany

“The Sachims of the Onnondages say that they then came to confirm the Ancient Brotherhood which they would remind their Bretheren has subsisted from the first Instance of Navigation being in use here (at the Time of a Governor Called Jacques) [Eelckens] and hath continued to the Time of Old Corlaer [Arent van Curler] and from Old Corlaer to his Present Excellency, for the continuance of which they much rejoice and now Renew the ancient Covenant and make the Chain bright.”⁴¹

³⁹ *JR* 43: 107-9.

⁴⁰ *JR* 44: 207.

⁴¹ *WA*, 9; Richter (ed.), “Rediscovered Links in the Covenant Chain: Previously Unpublished Transcripts of New York Indian Treaty Minutes, 1677-1691”, *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings* 92 (1982), pp. 45–85 at 76.

7 July 1689

Speaker(s): Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, and Oneidas

Location: Albany

“The Sinnekes, Cayouges, onnondages, and Oneydes Speak to the Magistrates of Albany and Say they are come to Renew the old Covenant made with Jaques many years ago who came with a Ship into their Waters and Received them as Brethren, and then the Maquase, oneydes, and onnondages desired him to Establish himself in this Country and the Sinnekes and Cayouges they drew into that General Covenant and that they had with one accord planted the Tree of Good Understanding.... They say that the Maquase, oneydes, and onnondages did carry the Ankor of the Ship that Jaques came in, to onnondage that being the meeting place of the five Nations, and this they now renew and confirm.”⁴²

12 June 1691

Speaker(s): Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas

Location: Albany

“We have been informed by our Forefathers that in former times a Ship arrived here in this Country which was [a] matter of great admiration to us, especially our desire to know what was within her Belly. In that ship were Christians, amongst the rest one Jaques with whom we made a Covenant of friendship, which Covenant hath since been tied together with a chaine and always ever since kept inviolable by the Brethren and us, in which Covenant it was agreed that whoever should hurt or prejudice, the one should be guilty of injuring all, all of us being comprehended in one common league.”⁴³

15 May 1694

Speaker(s): Five Nations (unspecified)

Location: Albany

“When the Christians first arrived in this Country we received them Kindly tho[ugh] they were but a Small People and entered into a League with

⁴² Richter, “Rediscovered Links”, p. 81.

⁴³ NYCD 3:775.

them to protect them from all Enemies whatsoever. We were so desirous of their Friendship and Society that we tied the Great Canoe which brought them hither, not with a piece of Bark or Rope to a Tree, but with a Chain to a Great Mountain.”⁴⁴

25 August 1694

Speaker(s): Five Nations (Onondaga Aqueendara, a.k.a. Sadekenaktie as speaker)

Location: Albany

“[In] the days of Old, when the Christians came first into this River, we made a Covenant with them, first with the Bark of a Tree, afterwards it was renewed with a twisted With [sic], but in process of time, lest that should decay and rot, the Covenant was fastened with a Chain of Iron, which ever since has been called the Covenant Chain, and the end of it was made fast at Onnondage, which is the centre of the five Nations. And therefore it was concluded, that whoever should violate or molest that Chain, or any part of it, the parties linked in the Chain should unanimously fall on such, and destroy them, they should certainly die the Death.”⁴⁵

1 August 1698

Speaker(s): Five Nations (Onondaga Aqueendara, a.k.a. Sadekenaktie as speaker)

Location: Albany

“In the times of old there came a Ship into this Country in which there was one jaques (sic) who brought in the same great Plenty of Goods, with whom we entered into a strict alliance, and tied his Ship with the bark of a Tree, which was often renewed until at length we changed the bark of the Tree which kept our Alliance firm, and made it a more substantial matter, by which it became a Covenant Chain, which is the term we have ever since used, and in this Covenant Chain we and the Brethren have been

⁴⁴ WA, p. 24.

⁴⁵ *An Account of the Treaty Between his Excellency Benjamin Fletcher, Captain-General and Governour in Chief of the Province of New-York &c. and the Indians of the Five Nations, viz., the Mohaques, Oneydes, Onnondages, Cajonges, and Sennekes, at Albany* (New York, 1694), p. 7.

continually linked, and fixed so sure, that we have never since withdrawn our hands from it.”⁴⁶

21 August 1698

Speaker(s): Laurentian Mohawk headmen

Location: Montréal

This is a report of the 1 August 1698 speech of Aqueendara in Albany.⁴⁷

8 September 1700

Speaker(s): Five Nations (Onondaga Aqueendara, a.k.a. Sadekenaktie as speaker)

Location: Albany

Aqueendara reminded Bellomont that “the trade” was what “induced us at first to make the Covenant Chain together,” and pledged his desire to continue “hand in hand together, and to stand and fall together, and that your Lordship will support us against our enemies.”⁴⁸

30 July 1701

Speaker(s): (signatories from all Five Nations)

Location: Albany

The speaker stated that the Haudenosaunee had “lived peaceably and quietly with the people of Albany our fellow [English] subjects above eighty years when we first made a firm league and covenant chain with these Christians that first came to settle [at] Albany.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Propositions Made by the Five Nations of Indians, viz., The Mohaques, Oneydes, Onnondages, Cayouges, and Sinnekes, to his Excellency Richard, Earl of Bellomont, Capt. General and Governour in Chief of his Majesties Province of New-York, &c. in Albany, the 20th of July, Anno. Dom. 1698* (New York, 1698), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁷ NYCD 9: pp. 685-6; Claude-Charles Le Roy, *dit* Bacqueville de la Potherie, *Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale: Relation d'un Séjour en Nouvelle-France* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1997 [1722]), 2: pp. 619-21.

⁴⁸ NYCD 4:733.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 909.

14 September 1722

Speaker(s): unnamed representative of all Five Nations

Location: Albany

“When the Christians first came to this Country our Ancestors fastened the ship that brought them behind a Great Mountain with a Chain in order to secure the same which mountain lyes behind the Sinnekes Country, so that the one end of the Chain, being fastened there and the other end at the Ship, if any body would steal away and molest this ship the chain will jingle and make noise and so alarm all the 5 Nations who are bound to defend this ship and this is the foundation and original of the Covenant Chain among the 5 Nations, which our ancestors made, which was to preserve this ship from any harm. Gave a Belt of Wampum.”⁵⁰

2 September 1723

Speaker: unidentified Haudenosaunee

Location: Boston

“Formerly we lived alone and were Masters of this Land. Afterwards one came over the seas from afar who had a skin like one of us and Entred our Land and was Master of our Rivers Who We had discoursed with and was Welcome to us, he was a Spaniard. After this Arrived the Dutch who brought with them many things We wanted and never saw before[.] We gladly saw them and there was Great Joy on both sides. Who sat down where our River Indians now live; after whom came the English Who had a dispute with the Dutch and Afterwards the English and Dutch became Brethren and were Masters of the Land together.... The Reason why there has been Such a Love between Us and the English was because they had what suited us, and We had what suited them; and so we have since been Brethren and Entred into a Covenant between us, which was not to be broken.... At the first arrival of the English We did not take so much Care of their Vessell as We have done since, but did only fasten it with a Cord of Grass. After this our Love to them Caused us to take more Care and fasten their Vessell with a stronger Cord, Carrying it up and fastening it to the Great Mountain the Seneca’s Country, least that the Vessell should be Driven from us and We loose their Friendship; It was our Fore Fathers pleasure afterwards to kindle a Fire at Albany at which they might Light

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5:667.

their Pipes; this Fire was kindled at Albany, not at York, nor at Boston, nor Virginia, nor anywhere else; that was the thought and pleasure of our Fore Fathers.... The Tree that was planted by our Forefathers at Albany was such That it reaches up to the Heavens, and may be seen by every Body which has also been supported by us, Queder, and the Government of York. In the first place we took hold of one another's hands and afterwards with a string, then with a Chain which was Strong, Finally you Offered a Golden Chain which has firmly bound us ever Since and will Continue to hold us and our Children for ever."⁵¹

30 June 1737

Speaker: unidentified but possibly "the Speaker of the Six Nations named Cachjagerocden"⁵²

Location: Albany

"In Antient Times when our forefathers first met at this place we will tell you what happened; before there was a house in this place, when we lodged under the Leaves of the Trees, the Christians and We Entered into a Covenant of friendship, and the Indians loved the Christians on account the[y] sold them the goods Cheap. This Government was likened unto a Great Ship which was moared behind a great Yper [i.e., elm] Tree, but because the Tree was perishable, the Anchor was lifted up and laid behind the Great hill at Onondage and the Six Nations are to take care of that Anchor: that it not be removed by any Enemy."⁵³

circa June 1743

Speaker: Sganarady (Mohawk) recorded by Moravian missionary Johann Christopher Pylaeus

Location: unspecified Mohawk settlement

"The peace alliance between the 5 nations, called for that reason Aquanoschióni, i.e., those who make up a house, the family, the allies, was formed one man's life ago, before the white people built Albany, or rather, were first seen in that area. According to the account of a credible old Indian named Sganarády, this Indian's grandfather was called Tokaháyon

⁵¹ Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, pp. 278–9.

⁵² NYCD 6:107.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 106.

and he was one of those deputies who the Indians had sent to form an alliance of peace with the whites (Europeans). The location of this meeting was near the Normanskill, 4 miles below the place where Albany was later built, to which place the *Mohawks* first came for the formation of the alliance [i.e., of the Five Nations].”⁵⁴

26 June 1744

Speaker: Canasatego, Onondaga leader, representing the League

Location: Lancaster, Pennsylvania

“It is true, that above One Hundred Years ago the *Dutch* came here in a Ship, and brought with them several Goods; such as Awls, Knives, Hatchets, Guns, and many other Particulars, which they gave us; and when they had taught us how to use their Things, and we saw what sort of People they were, we were so well pleased with them, that we tied their Ship to the Bushes on the Shore; and afterwards, liking them still better the longer they staid with us, and thinking the Bushes too slender, we removed the Rope, and tied it to the Trees; and as the Trees were liable to be blown down by the high Winds, or to decay of themselves, we, from the Affection we bore them, again removed the Rope, and tied it to a strong and big Rock [*here the Interpreter said they mean the Oneido country*] and not content with this, for further Security we removed the Rope to the big Mountain [*here the Interpreter says they mean the Onandago Country*] and there we tied it very fast, and rowl’d Wampum about it; and, to make it still more secure, we stood upon the Wampum, and sat down upon it, to defend it, and to prevent any Hurt coming to it, and did our best Endeavours that it might remain uninjured for ever. During all this Time, the New-comers, the *Dutch*, acknowledged our Right to the Lands, and sollicited from us, from Time to Time, to grant them Parts of our Country, and to enter into League and Covenant with us, and to become one People with us. After this the *English* came into the Country, and, as we were told, became one People with the *Dutch*. About two years after the Arrival of the *English*, an *English* Governor came to *Albany*, and finding what great Friendship subsisted between us and the *Dutch*, he approved it mightily, and desired to make as strong a

⁵⁴ John Heckewelder, *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States* (New York: Arno Press, 1971 [1876]), xxvii–xxix. See also Starna, “Retrospecting the Origins of the League of the Iroquois”, pp. 285–6.

League, and to be upon as good Terms with us as the Dutch were, with whom he was united, and to become one People with us; And by his further Care in looking into what had passed between us, he found that the Rope which tied the Ship to the great Mountain was only fastened with Wampum, which was liable to break and rot, and to perish in a Course of Years; he therefore told us, he would give us a Silver Chain, which would be much stronger, and which would last for ever. This we accepted, and fastened the Ship with it, and it has lasted ever since.”⁵⁵

25 April 1748

Speaker: William Johnson

Location: Onondaga

“Brethren of the five Nations I will begin upon a thing of a long standing, our first Brotherhood. My Reason for it is, I think there are several among you who seem to forget it; It may seem strange to you how I a Foreigner should know this, But I tell you I found some of the Old Writings of Our Forefathers which was thought to have been lost and in this old valuable Record I find that our first Friendship Commenced at the Arrival of the first great Canoe or Vessel at Albany, at which you were much surprised but finding what it contained pleased you so much, being Things for your Purpose, as our People convinced you of by shewing you the use of them, that you all Resolved to take the greatest care of that Vessel that nothing should hurt her Whereupon it was agreed to tie her fast with a great Rope to one of the largest Nut Trees on the Bank of the River. But on further Consideration in a fuller meeting it was thought safest Fearing the Wind should blow down that Tree to make a long Rope and tie her fast at Onondaga which was accordingly done and the Rope put under your feet That if anything hurt or touched the said Vessel by the shaking of the Rope you might know it, and then agreed to rise all as one and see what the Matter was and whoever hurt the Vessel was to suffer. After this was agreed on and done you made an offer to the Governor to enter into a Band of Friendship with him and his People which he was so pleased at that he told you he would find a strong Silver Chain which would never break slip or Rust to bind you and him forever in Brotherhood together and that your Warriours and Ours should be as one Heart, one Head, one Blood, &ca. and

⁵⁵ NYCD 6: 446; Susan Kalter (ed.), *Benjamin Franklin, Pennsylvania, and the First Nations: The Treaties of 1736-1762* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2006), pp. 94-5.

that what happened to the one happened to the other. After this firm agreement was made our Forefathers finding it was good and foreseeing the many Advantages both sides would reap of it, Ordered that if ever that Silver Chain should turn the least Rusty, offer to slip or break, that it should be immediately brightened up again, and not let it slip or break on any account for then you and we were both dead. Brethren these are the words of our Wise Forefathers which some among you know very well to be so....A large Belt of Wampum.”⁵⁶

1751

Speaker: Archibald Kennedy of the New York Council

Location: New York

“When the first Ship arrived here from *Europe*, the *Indians* it is said, were so well-pleased, that they would have tied her to a Tree, in order the better to secure her; but as Cables were subject to rot, they would have it an Iron Chain, and this to be continued into the *Indian* Countries, that they might be the better able to keep their Part of it clear of Rust, as we were to keep our Part. If the *Indians* were in Distress or Want, the Call was, as it is at this Day, to come and make clean, or renew the Covenant Chain, and the Christians on their Part, were to do the like: And accordingly we have assisted them in their Wars and Wants, and they have assisted us in our Wars, and we have their Furs. This is the original Contract and Treaty of Commerce with the Five Nations.”

24 June 1755

Speaker: William Johnson

Location: Mount Johnson [Johnson’s home]

“Behold Brethren these great Books [Four folio Volumes of the Records of Indian Affairs which lay upon the Table before the Colonel] They are Records of the many solemn Treaties and the various Transactions which have passed between your Forefathers and your Bretheren the English, also between many of you here present and us your Bretheren now living. You well know and these Books testify that it is now almost 100 years since your

⁵⁶ *WJP* 1: pp. 157-9.

Forefathers and ours became known to each other. That upon our first acquaintance we shook hands and finding we should be useful to one another, entered into a Covenant of Brotherly love and mutual friendship. And tho' we were at first only tied together by a Rope, yet lest this Rope should grow rotten and break, we tied ourselves together by an iron Chain – lest time and accident might rust and destroy this Chain of iron, we afterwards made one of Silver; the strength and brightness of which would but eject to no decay [sic – would be subject to no decay?]. The ends of this Silver chain we fixt to the immoveable mountains, and this in so firm a manner that the hands of no mortal Enemy might be able to remove it.”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ NYCD 6:970.