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

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”? 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? 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.


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. 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

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than a century, and with increasing frequency since 1989, Haudeno
saunee 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 gov-
erned by mutual respect, reciprocity, and renewal. From the standpoint of
the Haudenosaunee, the kaswentha relationship embodies one of interde-
pendence: 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 indige-
nous-settler relations in contemporary North America.7

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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
Otto, Dutch-Munsee Encounter in America, pp. 54-5, 61-2, 70; Starna, “Retrospecting the

7 For evidence of the Two Row tradition circa 1870-1989, see Foster, “Another Look at the
Function of Wampum,” p. 121n8; 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: Haudeno
saunee 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
(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
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-
118-21; James W. Ransom and Kreg T. Ettenger, “Polishing the Kaswentha: A Haudeno
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. 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

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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


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.

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 deep-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

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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

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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. 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.

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.

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).

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

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 \( \textit{Mercenaria mercenaria} \), 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. 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. 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). Flat discoidal beads rendered in purple and white shell appear at the Mohawk Klock site (occupied

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circa 1560-80), which may signal the origins of two-color mnemonics in bead usage (albeit in strung rather than woven format). Purple discoidal beads likely represented the conceptual precursor to the tubular purple wampum beads known to exist in significant quantity after 1630. 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.

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”

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

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 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 Haude- nosauenee 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.

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,” 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.” 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), and the 1656 and 1658 recitations (see Appendix) mark clear efforts on the part

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*.

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. 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*, 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.

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

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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 commodityes” 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

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 Tekahnawiaks 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

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

Non-Native historians are only beginning to recognize the value of indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing to their research.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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 \textit{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.

\textsuperscript{37} King, “Value of Water”, p. 461.

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 Agnieronons 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

40 JR 44: 207.
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 3775.
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.”\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{25 August 1694}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Speaker(s): Five Nations (Onondaga Aqueendara, a.k.a. Sadekenaktie as speaker)
  \item Location: Albany
\end{itemize}

“[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 Wit\[sic\], 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.”\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{1 August 1698}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Speaker(s): Five Nations (Onondaga Aqueendara, a.k.a. Sadekenaktie as speaker)
  \item Location: Albany
\end{itemize}

“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

\textsuperscript{44} Wa, p. 24.
continually linked, and fixed so sure, that we have never since withdrawn our hands from it."\footnote{Propositions Made by the Five Nations of Indians, viz., The Mohaques, Oneydes, Onondages, 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.}

21 August 1698  
Speaker(s): Laurentian Mohawk headmen  
Location: Montréal


8 September 1700  
Speaker(s): Five Nations (Onondaga Aqueendara, a.k.a. Sadekenaktie as speaker)  
Location: Albany

Aqueendera 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.”\footnote{NYCD 4:733.}

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.”\footnote{\textit{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.”

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 discursd 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 Pyrlaeus
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

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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 rowld 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

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

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 Brothership. 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 Vessell 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 Vessell 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 Vessell 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 Brothership together and that your Warriours and Ours should be as one Heart, one Head, one Blood, &ca. and
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 testifie that it is now almost 100 years since your

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 NYC 6:970.