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Honoring the Two Row Wampum

The world has changed significantly in the 400 years since the Haudenosaunee (the Six Nations Iroquois) recorded the Two Row Wampum Belt, their first agreement with the Dutch. Despite the changes that our Region has witnessed, the Treaty's messages of friendship, peace, and 'living in parallel' are as important today as they have ever been. Honoring the Two Row Wampum Treaty is a reminder that collaboration is the key to living peacefully together on this Earth. [Read more.](#)

[Full Story]

Honoring the Two Row Wampum

The Haudenosaunee consider the Two Row to be the first treaty between them and the European arrivals. It is believed to have taken place in 1613, according to oral tradition and other historic evidence. The Haudenosaunee ("People of the Long House," also known as the Iroquois Confederacy) are made up of an alliance of six native nations. The alliance continues to function after hundreds of years of traditions through shared cultural values and the constitution known as the Great Law of Peace. The six nations are the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora.

In hopes of reaching an agreement to live peacefully and in harmony with the newcomers, the Haudenosaunee formed a treaty to protect and honor the Earth and the rights inherent to living on the land. It is a relationship essential to the newcomers who did not know how to live among the new climate, soil, plants, and animals. The agreement, symbolically recorded on the Two Row Wampum belt (known as Guswenta) outlined a mutual agreement between the Haudenosaunee and the Europeans. It was a commitment to friendship, peace between peoples, and living in parallel forever, defined "as long as the grass is green, as long as the waters flow downhill, and as long as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west."



Onondaga Nation Chief Irving Powless Jr. displays the two row wampum belt at the Onondaga Land Rights forum at Syracuse Stage. *Photo by Mike Greenlar*

In his paper titled “On Treaty-making,” Chief Irving Powless, Jr. contextualizes the meaning and importance of the Two Row Wampum:

“The Two Row Wampum belt is made of white and purple beads. The white beads denote truth. Our record says that one purple row of beads represents a sailboat. In the sailboat are the Europeans, their leaders, their government, and their religion. The other purple row of beads represents a canoe. In the canoe are the Native Americans, their leaders, their governments, and their Way of Life, or religion as you say it. We shall travel down the road of life, parallel to each other and never merging with each other.

In between the two rows of purple beads are three rows of white beads. The first row of white beads is “peace,” the second row, “friendship,” and the third row, “forever.” As we travel down the road of life together in peace and harmony, not only with each other, but with the whole circle of life—the animals, the birds, the fish, the water, the plants, the grass, the trees, the stars, the moon, and the thunder—we shall live together in peace and harmony, respecting all those elements. As we travel the road of life, because we have different ways and different concepts, we shall not pass laws governing the other. We shall not pass laws telling you what to do. You shall not pass a law telling me and my people what to do.

The Haudenosaunee have never violated this treaty...
We have never passed a law telling you how to live...

You and your ancestors, on the other hand, have passed laws that continually try to change who I am, what I am, and how I shall conduct my spiritual, political and everyday life.”

Since the Two Row Treaty, the environment has seen its share of degradation. Unimaginable at the time, the land, the water, the air, landscape and the ecology of the region have changed drastically throughout the centuries.

Four hundred years later, the grass remains green, water continue to flow downhill, and the sun still rises in the east and sets in the west. However, waters have been polluted and land has been taken and altered in ways that violate the Two Row Wampum Treaty. The intentions of the Two Row, and many of the similar agreements that followed it, have met with routine violations by the Europeans and their descendants

In 2013, people of our bioregion will join together and renew our promise to keep the environment livable and to uphold social justice and peace with all our neighbors (human and non-human). We must work together as a collective whole to ensure that future generations will honor and uphold the Treaty.

About the Campaign



The [Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign](#) is a partnership between the [Onondaga Nation](#) and [Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation](#) (NOON) – a project of the Syracuse Peace Council. The 2013 campaign marks the 400th anniversary of the first treaty between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch immigrants.

Andy Mager, a member of the Syracuse Peace Council, is serving as the overall campaign coordinator and coordinator of the Haudenosaunee relations, in addition to the fund development aspects of the campaign. Mager first became involved in environmental and peace activism during his high school years after reading *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown. He was devastated by the crimes of his country and became active in these issues since.

Decades later, NOON was founded by a group of committed Central New Yorkers who believed we have a responsibility to live up to the treaties. Mager states, “the concept for the Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign came from my thinking about the dismissal of the [Onondaga Land Rights Action](#) and how NOON could work to achieve the goals of the land rights action outside of court... taking the case to the people of New York State.”

A growing list of [Campaign co-sponsors](#) includes non-profits, faith communities, and social justice groups. The list also includes a number of academic departments and institutions in the region, including [SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry](#), Manhattanville College through its [Connie Hogarth Center for Social Action](#), [Wells College](#), and more.

The Environmental Consortium of Colleges & Universities is a cosponsor of the Renewal Campaign. The campaign’s emphases on unity through concurrent teaching and learning, the protection of the regional and global environment, and the need for cultural change in our community mirror the mission and goals of the Consortium.

The campaign's Honorary Advisory Committee includes indigenous leaders such as Oren Lyons, Suzan Harjo and Leonard Peltier; Syracuse University Chancellor Nancy Cantor; folksinger Pete Seeger; internationally-acclaimed primatologist Jane Goodall and others.

Symbolic Enactment



In late July 2013, a symbolic “enactment” and a sign of unity and dedication will include Haudenosaunee and other native people paddling side-by-side with allies and supporters down the Hudson River. The flotilla will start near Albany, New York and stop for educational and cultural events along the way to the final destination in New York City on Friday, August 9, 2013 to participate in the [United Nations International Day of the World’s Indigenous People](#).

In a summer 2012 press release publicizing a [trial run](#) of the symbolic “enactment” of the treaty, Onondaga Nation Chief Irving Powless Jr. explains, “Our ancestors agreed that you could live together with us on our land so long as you followed the natural laws. It means to not pollute the water, nor the air, or the plants and medicines. We want our grandchildren to have these things too.”

This campaign seeks to provide opportunities for Onondaga and other Haudenosaunee leaders to share information with thousands of people and build a movement to honor the treaties we have made with native nations and protect the Earth. Environmental cleanup and preservation is a core component of the campaign.

The stated goals of the Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign are:

In Peace...

To increase awareness and understanding of the relations between the Haudenosaunee, other Native nations and the United States, highlighting the importance of the Two Row Wampum Treaty and building momentum for respect of indigenous sovereignty by the citizens and government of New York State.

Friendship...

Increase recognition and appreciation of the contemporary Haudenosaunee and other Native nations of New York, including their culture, aspirations, worldview and ecological knowledge.

Forever, ensuring a sustainable future...

Sharing the Two Row Wampum as a model for how we can halt environmental destruction and move together towards a sustainable future, one based in natural law, *in peace and friendship forever.*

Collaboration

If you have ideas for an event in 2013 to Honor the Two Row, or would like to co-sponsor the Campaign, contact NOON at 315-472-5478.

Visit www.HonorTheTwoRow.org or connect to the Campaign on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

“Our state, nation and world are on the brink of environmental catastrophe. We need to recognize the depth of those problems and seek transformative solutions.

Indigenous peoples offer important guidance and inspiration for a very different model of life, one which understands us as part of nature, not separate and above.”

*Andy Mager
Syracuse Peace Council*