

## Talking Points on History and Meaning of the Two Row Wampum Belt

Rick Hill

Deyohahá:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Ohsweken, ON

March 2013

- 1) The proper Hodinohson:ni name for the Two Row Wampum is *Teioháte* (Two Paths/Roads in Mohawk Language) *Kaswenta* (*Wampum Belt*); Other say it is called *Tekani teyothata 'tye kaswenta*; or *Aterihwihsón:sera Kaswénta* (Cayuga).
- 2) We know there has been a lot of discussion in the press and academic journals about the validity of the Two Row Wampum. None of the authors of these articles has ever heard the reading of the Two Row Wampum in our language. They do not know what it tells us.
- 3) Wampum represents our interpretation of the agreements that took place. It is our understanding that we have inherited from our ancestors, which is not subject for debate; to be shared with those who are willing consider our side of the story.
- 4) It does not matter whether the Van Loon document is real or not. There are enough historical facts that reinforce our oral history.
- 5) We do know that the place named Tawagonshi in that document was also referenced by William Beauchamp as a site, two miles from Albany near the Noordtman's Kill (Normans Kill, and was called *Tawassagunshee* or *Tawassgunshee*. (William M. Beauchamp, *Aboriginal Place Names I of New York*, New York State Museum Bulletin 108 (Albany: New York State Education Department, 1907), p.24.
- 6) We also know that one of the men mentioned in the Van Loon document, Jacques Elekens (also referred to as Jacob Eelckens, Jaques Elckens, Jacob Elkins, Jacob Eelkes and James Elkins), was stationed at Castle Island in 1613 by Van Tweenhuysen Company, which was to later receive an exclusive charter to operate in the Albany region. He became the commander of Fort Nassau by 1614 and the governor of the settlement the following year.
- 7) Dr. William Sturtevant, curator at the National Museum of Natural History, wrote in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Smithsonian Institution, 1978, that the memory of the treaty at Tawasgunshi Hill "lived on in the oral traditions of the Mohawks, Delaware, and Mahican up to the 1740s." (citing NYCD 3:775, 4:902-903; 6: 466; Heckewelder 1819: xxvii-xxix, 60-61)
- 8) Based upon the reading of the Two Row Wampum, the first encounter between the *Ögwë'ö:weh* (Original People, represented by the Mohawks) and the *Skaghneghtadaronni* (Dutch) is described as the beginning of the treaty relationship. We believe that that the first encounter at this location took place in 1613. The Two Row Wampum Belt, which perhaps came soon after, includes the summary of the first encounter events.
- 9) While the Dutch claimed trading jurisdiction over the territory between the Connecticut and the Delaware Rivers, which they called Nie Undenerland (New Netherlands), we also know that the Dutch wanted to create linkages with Native Nations to foster their world-wide trading empire. Some kind of agreement in principle was required. Company directors were given the authority to make

- treaties or alliances with Native trading partners. The Dutch applied the principle of reciprocity with their Native trading partners and it was a mutually beneficial relationship.
- 10) In Hodinohson:ni treaty making, the principles of the *Kanianerenko:wa* (Great Law/Great Goodness) were extended to the newcomers (terms in Seneca):
    - a. *Sgënö'* (Peace)
    - b. *Ga'hasdehsäh* (Strength through Unity)
    - c. *Ga'nigoi:yoh* (Good Mind and Equal Justice)
  - 11) What began in 1613 was soon formalized in a series of treaties. Joel Munsell, in *The Annals of Albany*, vol. 1, Second edition, Albany, 1869, writes of a Five Nations-Dutch treaty council in April of 1618 at Tawassgunshee, and hill at Normans kill were the Dutch erected a new fort. This was to formalize the relationship spoken of in the Two Row Wampum. James Grant Wilson, wrote in *The memorial history of the City of New-York* (v.1), ([New York]:New York History Co., 1892-93.), that at that treaty, the Dutch and the *Kanien'kehá:ka* (Mohawk) held a long wampum belt between them, and that representatives of neighboring Native Nations had to stand so that the wampum rested upon their shoulders.
  - 12) O'Callahan wrote that the above treaty followed the end of the exclusive license enjoyed by the New Netherland Company three years previous, and the moving for the trading fort to Tawassgunshee. (citing *Albany Record*, xxiv, 167). He mentions the 'belt of peace' held by the trading partners at that time, along with the burying of a hatchet and smoking of the calumet. (E.B. O'Callaghan, M.D., *History of the Netherland; or New York Under the Dutch*. Vol. 1, Second Addition, New York, 1845, p 78-80)
  - 13) A notebook of treaty minutes was discovered about 30 years ago containing references to later treaty negotiations (see #12 & 13 below) that appear to acknowledge that the Hodinohson:ni made a trade agreement with Elekens. Daniel K. Richter, who found the notebook, suggests that Jacob Eelckens, the elusive "Jacques" mentioned in Hodinohson:ni oral tradition, could have been the negotiator. We believe that this is true. (Daniel K. Richter, "Rediscovered Links in the Covenant Chain: Previously Unpublished Transcripts of New York Indian Treaty Minutes, 1677-1691," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 92: pt. I (1982), pp. 45-85, esp. 49-54.)
  - 14) While a specific, uncontested, historical document has not been found to affirm the date of the first meeting, an agreement resulted from this first encounter according to our oral history and wampum memory. This is why we are commemorating the event today.
  - 15) In 1678 Onondaga diplomats came to Albany, NY to renew the Covenant Chain. The minutes from that encounter state: "*that they came to confirm the Ancient Brotherhood which they would remind their Brethren has subsisted from the first Instance of Navagation being in use here (at the Time of a Gov<sup>r</sup> Called Jacques) & hath continued to the Time of Old Corlaer & from Old Corlear to his Present Excell<sup>y</sup>, for the Continuance of which they much rejoice & now Renew the ancient Covenant & make the Chain Bright.*"

- 16) The *Ancient Brotherhood* they speak of is the treaty relationship they had enjoyed with the Dutch. The *first Instance of Navagation* is the first time the Dutch ship made its way into the sight of the Mohawks near Albany. The *Gov<sup>r</sup> Called Jacques* refers to Jacob Eelckens. *Time of Old Corlaer* refers to the period when Arent Van Curler was the principle trading agent in the Albany region after 1637, whose name afterwards became the title of the governor of the New York colony, in the mind of the Hodinohson:ni.
- 17) On June 27, 1689 the Hodinohson:ni sent delegates to Albany and they restated their oral history on when their vessels first met. The minutes from that 1689 council include: *“They are come to Renew the old Covenant made with Jaques many years ago who came with a Ship into the Waters & rec<sup>d</sup> them as Brethren.”*
- 18) 1689 - The Hodinohson:ni also stated that once Jacques *“Established himself in this Country”* with the Mohawks, that the other nations *“drew into that General Covenant.”* This resulted in the planting of the Tree of *“good Understanding.”* They also noted that the Mohawks, Oneidas and Onondagas did *“carry the Ankor of the Ship that Jaques came in”* to the place of the central fire at Onondaga. The *Ankor* is a metaphor for the three links in the first chain proposed by the Dutch (see 27 h below)
- 19) 1691 – At a treaty council with N.Y colonial governor Henry Sloughter, the Hodinohson:ni recap their oral and wampum tradition of when the vessels first met: *“Our Forefathers have Told us in former times that a ship arrived in this Country, which was [a] matter of Great Admiration to us, especially our desire was known What should be within her Belly & found they were Christians & among the Rest One Jacques, with whom we made a Covenant Chain of Friendship, which has always been kept inviolable, both by the Brethren & us in which Covenant it was agreed That whosoever should hurt or Prejudice the one would be Guilty of Injuring all of us, being comprehended in One Common League.”*
- 20) 1693 - Onondaga speaker Dekanissora visited Albany, to lay the matter before *Cayenquirago* (Governor Benjamin Fletcher) and *Queder* (Major Peter Schuyler), and spoke of the origins of the treaty relationship: *“when the Christians first arrived in this country, we received them kindly. When they were but a small people, we entered into a league with them, to guard them from all enemies whatsoever. We were so fond of their society that we tied the great canoe which brought them, not with a rope made of bark, to a tree, but with a strong iron chain fastened to a great mountain.”*
- 21) 1723 – At the first treaty with the English that acknowledged the Six Nations, a Hodinohson:ni speaker explained how what had begun the growth of the Two Row concepts: *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 at Albany at which they might Light their pipes. . . In the first place wee took hold of one anothers hands and afterwards with a string, then with a Chain which is 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. @It is not known why the Chain is said to be gold, most likely it was a mistranslation.*
- 22) The ship and canoe imagery can also be seen in a personal seal developed by *Warraghyhagey* (Sir William Johnson) (see below\*). Canajoharie Artist Rufus A. Grider (1817-1900) made a tracing of that seal in 1898, and described it: *“Endless chain held by 6 Indians and one white man. Wigwam, tree and pipe and canoe - Ind<sup>n</sup> Emblems, Ship white man emblems.”* There are fifty links in that Chain, likely a reference to the fifty chiefs of the Confederacy. Within that Chain are the canoe and ship, along with a peace pipe, tree of peace symbol and smoke rising from the council fire/council house. These reflect what Johnson had inevitably heard from the Two Row Wampum recitals. (*The papers of Sir William Johnson*, University of the State of New York. Division of Archives and History (1921) p. 98)
- 23) 1748 - *Warraghyhagey* gives a recap of the Two Row wampum/covenant chain treaty, while in council at Onondaga: *“I tell you I found out some of the old Writings of our Forefathers which was thought to be 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.”* Johnson was referring to the 1691 treaty council mentioned above. *“Whereupon it was agreed to tye 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 tye her fast at Onondaga which was accordingly done and the Rope put under your Feet That if anything hurt or touched 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 Bond 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 in Brotherhood together, and your Warriors and ours should be as one Heart, on Blood &c.”* (*The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 1:158)
- 24) 1755 – Johnson further noted, holding four great portfolios with copies of all the treaties since 1664, recalled the metaphors of the vessels being tied together. : *“Upon our first acquaintance we shook hands & finding we should be useful to one another entered into a Covenant of Brotherly Love & mutual Friendships. And tho’ we were only tied together by a Rope, yet lest this Rope should grow rotten & break we tied ourselves together by an Iron Chain.”*
- 25) The words of the Two Row Wampum Belt speak of the first encounter as *When they joined together each other’s arms*. This lining of arms was the foundation for the later Covenant Chain. It means both the handshake that offered to confirm each section of the first agreement, but also is a metaphor from the *Kanianerenko:wa* (Great Law/Great Goodness) when the founding chiefs linked their arms together in a shown of solidarity and to represent their united strength when they came to one mind to perpetuate peace. Therefore, any treaty agreement was thought to convey this same underlying principle.

- 26) Oral History on the Two Row Wampum Belt (based upon Cayuga Chief Jacob Thomas reading, recorded by Michael Foster, Canadian Museum of Civilization, May 2007):
- a. There was not much “love” between the settlers and the Natives in the beginning of first contact.
  - b. The parties began to talk about forming a friendship.
  - c. The Creator did not intend that we would live in discord, and we should respect one another instead.
  - d. They came to one mind to make a legal agreements (meaning words on paper and words in wampum belts) so that all descendants will know what was agreed upon.
  - e. They agreed on the symbols of their new relationship:
    - i. First, they would have **friendship and love** as the Creator intended.
    - ii. In this way they would have **peace**.
    - iii. This will be symbolised by the **Earth**, the Creator’s creation, and its happenings (as long as the Earth lasts, so too will the agreement.)
    - iv. Second, we’ll take **each other by the hand** (take a hold of each other’s arm).
  - f. They agreed to call each other ‘brother,’ because brothers cannot control each other. They are equals.
  - g. They sealed their friendship by smoking sacred tobacco, so that the Creator will then *bear witness to our agreement*.
  - h. They agreed to solidify their agreements with a three-link chain:
    - i. First link stands for **friendship**.
    - ii. Second link stands for our both having **good minds**
    - iii. Third link means there will always be **peace**.
  - i. Principles of the agreement:
    - i. They both have their own **authority** (strength/power), and do not have jurisdiction over each other.
    - ii. They have their respective **beliefs**, from the same Creator.
    - iii. They have their respective **laws**.
  - j. Term of the Agreement – They agreed it will last as long as:
    - i. The **Sun** always makes it bright on earth.
    - ii. The **Waters** flow in a certain direction.
    - iii. The **Wild** Grasses grow at a certain time of year.
  - k. They placed their two vessels (*onake* = canoe & *honwey* = boat, in Mohawk) in the water, lined them up evenly and set them on parallel courses, for the people to follow:
    - i. Inside each they put their respective beliefs and laws.
  - l. The Ögwë’ö:weh said: “We will make a wampum belt of that likeness of two paths so people will know what we will go by.”
  - m. “People who get into your boat will be guided by it. Your people who will get into the canoe will be guided by the ways of the canoe.”

- n. Someone who has a foot in each boat might fall into the water and no power on earth can help them.
- o. From time to time, they will meet to polish off the dust that has settled in the agreements and thereby renew their relationship and the agreements we have made.
- p. “We will appear the way we did when we first met.” (meaning, wearing distinctive clothing)
- q. “All of our people shall always know of it (the agreements). And there will be peace in the days to come.”

**\* Sir William Johnson Seal**



27) Note: I do not know where the original Van Loon document is. I last saw it in 1980 and it was photographed at the Native American centre for the Living Arts in Niagara falls, NY. Oren Lyons has seen the original parchment offered by Van Loon as well. I understand that it was tested in the 1970s, however, I have never seen any results of such.