

The Two Row Wampum / *Guswénta*

The Two Row Wampum, a 17th century treaty between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch, was the first treaty made by the Confederacy with European settlers. It is understood by the Haudenosaunee to be the basis on which all subsequent treaties were made and is a model of relationships between peoples. It is in the spirit of the teachings of the Two Row that we present the writings compiled in this booklet.

The wampum itself is a white shell belt with two purple rows. The white field symbolizes peace and friendship and the two purple rows represent the separate but equal paths of two sovereign nations. It is traditionally put into words as follows:



NOON Archives

Chief Irving Powless showing the Two Row Wampum belt to the audience at "The Two Row Wampum and the Covenant Chain of Treaties" talk during the Onondaga Land Rights and Our Common Future series (2010). The 400th anniversary of the Two Row Wampum Treaty was commemorated in 2013.

You say that you are our father and I am your son.
We say, we will not be like Father and Son,
but like Brothers.

This wampum belt confirms our words.

These two rows will symbolize two paths
or two vessels,
traveling down the same river together.

One, a birch bark canoe, will be for our people,
our laws, our customs and our ways.

The other, a ship, will be for the white people
and their laws,
their customs and their ways.

We shall each travel the river together,
side by side, but in our boat.

Neither of us will make compulsory laws
or interfere in the internal affairs of the other.

Neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel.

The agreement has been kept by the
Haudenosaunee to this date.

*The Onondaga say of this agreement:
There is no ending to the two rows because the
agreement is to live on forever – for as long as the grass
grows, for as long as the water flows, and
for as long as the sun shines.*

HAUDENOSAUNEE CULTURE

Who Are the Haudenosaunee?

By Wendy Gonyea



THE MEMBER NATIONS ARE:

MOHAWK
Hadi nyeñ'gegá'
meaning **The People
of the Flint**

ONEIDA
Hadineñyotga'
meaning **The People
of the Upright Stone**

ONONDAGA
Onoñda'gegá'
meaning **The People
of the Hills**

CAYUGA
Gayogweñga'geh
meaning **The People
of the Great Swamp**

SENECA
Hadi noñdowa-neñh
meaning **The People
of the Great Hill**

TUSCARORA
Hoñdasgáyeñ'
meaning **The Shirt
Wearing People**

Well over a thousand years ago, the indigenous nations of the Eastern Woodlands joined together in an alliance of Nations called the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Haudenosaunee means People of the Longhouse. The Nations - the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca - unified as a result of a powerful message delivered to them by the Peacemaker who traveled across the waters in a stone canoe. His message of peace, unity and democracy is known as the Great Law of Peace, or the Great Law. The alliance and law was the first United Nations on this land, and is still the oldest, continuously operating form of traditional government in North America.

Each Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy lived on separate aboriginal territories for countless generations, predating the existence of the United States and Canada. The newcomers to this land called the Haudenosaunee the 'Five Nations' (English) or the 'Iroquois' (French). We continue to use our true name today; however, because of the common-ness of the English and French versions, exceptions can be found, such as the name of the lacrosse team, the Iroquois Nationals (see "Lacrosse: The Creator's Game," page 15). The Tuscarora joined the Confederacy in 1722, and today the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is also referred to as the Six Nations. Each of the Six Nations retains its authority to govern its own affairs and manifest the will of the people within the framework of the spiritual teachings, the Great Law, and its own Nation's laws.

The Great Law defines a system of governance, recorded by oral tradition and in wampum belts. The earliest democracy includes an elaborate system of checks and balances that influenced early American colonists in the formation of their new government. The Peacemaker said the Confederacy extends from the sunrise in the east to the sunset in the west, with the great Council Fire at the center, in the territory of the Onondaga Nation. The Great Law is like the morning sun. As it rises, it sheds the light of understanding on the minds of the people. The Peacemaker united the nations around the Council Fire, and the Council Chiefs formed a circle around the people. The first Grand Council was held on the shores of Onondaga Lake, in Onondaga territory. The Grand Council continues to meet at the Onondaga Nation Longhouse today.

The main principle of the Great Law is peace. The Peacemaker said the Creator never intended that humans should engage in the shedding of human blood and our people were directed to throw weapons of war underneath the Great Tree of Peace, and never to raise weapons against one another again. This Great Tree of Peace has guided the Haudenosaunee since that time. Haudenosaunee leaders are skilled diplomats in resolving conflict and settle any differences by rational thought. The Tree of Peace, a white pine, has roots extending in the four directions. It is known that any people seeking shelter may find sanctuary under the tree. At the top of the tree an eagle will sit to warn the Haudenosaunee of any danger approaching the people.



Kent Lyons

The Peacemaker
was able to make
Thadodá • ho' see
the kindness in
himself and change
his evil way of living.

THADODÁ-HO' AND HAYENHWÁTHA' *

As he traveled from village to village, the Peacemaker encountered the most difficulty in convincing the Onondaga to accept his message. In particular was a man so feared it is said his body was twisted and snakes grew from his head. This man was Thadodá-ho'. Thadodá-ho' worked against the Peacemaker by killing the daughters of the Peacemaker's helper, Hayenhwátha'. Hayenhwátha', secluded and in mourning, began making strings of wampum, and by using consoling words he was able to recover himself and resume his work with the Peacemaker. The other Nations of the Haudenosaunee accepted the message of the Peacemaker. For a second time the two men, Peacemaker and Hayenhwátha', approached the evil Thadodá-ho', who was about to consume his human meal. The Peacemaker was able to make Thadodá-ho' see the kindness in himself and change his evil way of living. Hayenhwátha' combed the snakes from Thadodá-ho's hair. He was restored to clear thinking and finally accepted the message of the Peacemaker. In this way the Haudenosaunee became a people of principled laws. They accepted a way of life to live in harmony with one another and a system of governance that is still followed today.

FOUNDATION

The five fires became one house: a Longhouse with specific procedures to keep the fires burning and the people of good healthy minds. The Peacemaker laid out the circle of fifty Chief titles, representative of the five Haudenosaunee Nations. Alongside each Chief will be a Clan Mother, both working for the people. In addition Faithkeepers will assist and see that proper procedures continue to be followed. The Council of fifty chiefs will meet in a Grand Council to be held at Onondaga, the center of the new Confederacy. The Grand Council will decide issues by reaching a consensus. They are to leave personal issues at the door, not use harsh tones and think about the coming generations in their decision making. They are to end their meetings before the sun sets.

Each Chief represents a Clan family. In an historic rite of equality in government, the Clanmother, also a leadership title, has the authority to "put up" or choose a Chief when the need arises. The Clanmother can also remove a Chief from his seat or title, if he is not working for the people in a good way. All titles are lifetime titles. When a Chief passes away, the Haudenosaunee have a procedure to follow that mourns the fallen Chief and also installs a new leader to the fallen Chief's seat. This ceremony is called a Condolence. In this way the great circle of 50 Chiefs remains unbroken and continues to work for the people. Each Nation was given a certain number of Chief titles and Clans. Chiefs and Clans are recognized throughout the Confederacy. Haudenosaunee languages are similar, differing some, but experienced speakers can comprehend all six languages.

CREATION

From *Iroquois Creation Story, Myth of the Earth Grasper*, John C. Mohawk:

Our world began with the creation of the earth. In the Sky world above lived Sky Holder and Sky Woman. She was pregnant with his child. Beside their lodge was the great tree of light, for which he was the caretaker. Because of Sky Woman's curiosity with the tree's bright light, she urged Sky Holder to uproot the tree. She fell into the dark world below, with soil clenched in her fist after having tried to cling to the tree's roots to stop her fall. She fell to a world of endless water. There the water

*The spellings of words in the Onondaga language have varied in the process of creating a written form for an oral language. Non-indigenous readers are more accustomed to "Tadodaho" and "Hiawatha".

animals decided to save her, for she came with the power to create life. The birds' interlocked wings broke her fall and set her upon the back of snapping turtle. Of all the animals, only muskrat could succeed in retrieving mud from the sea bottom - which he placed on turtle's back. As Sky Woman walked counter clockwise in ever expanding circles upon the mud, it grew into an island. From her dress and clutches fell seeds, which fell upon the soil. Soon she gave birth to a daughter who later had many suitors of male beings who could transform themselves into human form. She selected the being who wore scalloped leggings and a large robe, said to be turtle-being. He placed two arrows over her body at night, and she became pregnant. She had twins, but died giving birth to the second son, as he was born through her armpit. Sky Woman buried her daughter and from her body grew the Three Sisters - corn, beans, and squash. From her heart grew the tobacco plant which we still use as a way to carry our thoughts to the Sky World. The deceased daughter became known as Earth Mother. The earth she created on the back of a turtle we call Turtle Island.

One twin was called the right-handed twin, and the other was called the left-handed twin. The boys were raised by the grandmother under very stressful circumstances. The right handed twin, as he was maturing, began to have a vision that his duty was to create the world in the image of what he had been told about the Sky World. He hadn't seen the Sky World, but he was a member of that race. The twin began to dig up earth, the ground of Turtle Island, and blew life into the things he formed. In this manner he created life forms.

The left-handed twin saw the work his brother was doing and became very jealous of his life-creating abilities. In his mind the left-handed twin set out to destroy the new burgeoning life. One created ascending forms of life and the other created descending. One twin created ivy and the other created poison ivy. One created trees and the other put thorns on the branches. Eventually the two forms of life began to compete. The left-handed twin tried to enlist help from the bear and deer, to help dominate the earth, but the animals chose to follow the instructions from the Sky World. Finally the left-handed twin confronted a man and said, "I think you and I can dominate all the animals and all other life on the earth." The man said, "Tell me some more." This sparked the war between the two brothers. The right-handed twin won and banished the left-handed twin to the center of the earth where he oversees darkness. The right-handed twin became our elder brother, the sun.

The story of the twins presents the idea that humans have a power to manipulate nature in ways that could be extremely destructive, and that they have a responsibility to use the power prudently. There will be cycles to this world and cycles that will be known as life and death. Out of death will come the matter of life. Turtle Island is between both worlds. This is how we came to live on Turtle Island today.

OUR WAY OF LIFE CONTINUES

As the gifts of our universe continue to do their duties, as they have since the time of creation, the Haudenosaunee people continue a way of life in harmony with the world. Each part of creation is addressed in Thanksgivings at every gathering of the people and/or every day individually. We acknowledge and give thanks for the privilege of using the gifts that sustain us. Leaders of the natural world are acknowledged and given respect. The minds of all who are gathered are drawn together in unified thought by a speaker who is chosen to carry out the ancient words of our Ganonhanyonh, or the first words. It is in this way, ceremonies, meetings, gatherings on our territories begin still today.



There will be
cycles to this
world and cycles
that will be known
as life and death.
Out of death will
come the
matter of life.
Turtle Island is
between both
worlds.

Kent Lyons

By observing and noticing changes in our environment, the women titleholders gather to set the days designated for ceremony. When the sap begins to flow from the Maple tree, the date will be set and announced for the Maple Ceremony. When the earth warms and frost rests, a time will be set for Planting Ceremonies. When the Strawberries grow again, a day will be set to hold our Strawberry Ceremony. And so on for Bean, Green Corn, Harvest and Mid-Winter Ceremonies. The Haudenosaunee continue to live connected to our earth Mother, in balance with our needs as humans and respectful for what is given to us. This way of life was handed down to us through the generations and will be handed down to the generations next coming

WORDS OF OUR FRIEND, JOHN MOHAWK (1944-2006)

Although there were serious threats to Haudenosaunee continued existence, and although it must certainly have appeared... that the Iroquois were doomed, the Iroquois in fact are growing in strength and influence...albeit, not necessarily in unity. The Six Nations Council continues to meet at the Onondaga Longhouse near Nedrow, New York and at the Onondaga Longhouse near Ohsweken, Ontario. Its doors continue to be open to people who wish to use thinking instead of violence, just as the Peacemaker had hoped many centuries ago. As long as there are Iroquois Indians who are willing to place the good of the whole above the interests of the few, there will always be an Iroquois Confederacy.

From *The Iroquois Book of Life, White Roots of Peace*



History and Law

Excerpted from "A Special Report by the Haudenosaunee on some of the Primary Aspects of Law, Sovereignty and Governance," March, 1998

The Haudenosaunee believe that since the time of Creation our people have walked this land. The earth, as our mother, gave birth to us and we in turn become part of the earth itself. The land holds the bones of our ancestors and ties each succeeding generation of Haudenosaunee to this land in ways that no other humans can claim.

Our history and our law have grown together. They are not separate. The Creator watches over both history and law, and both have spiritual dimensions as a result. We cannot separate our spiritual laws from our civil laws. Our history and our law is based upon several elements.

First, spiritual laws gave form to the world in which we now live. These spiritual laws formed a natural law and became the basic framework from which our way of life evolved. These metaphysics for the natural world are our first laws. Our oral histories are full of object lessons describing how our ancestors gained an understanding of the world around them. These lessons provide us with insights which teach us how our own conduct should reflect the spiritual and practical interactions of all beings.

Second, the Original Instructions, given to our people by the Creator, teach us how to live on this land and how to express thanks for what we have been given. The Original Instructions are the second set of laws which obligate us to certain patterns of behavior and spiritual expression, as manifest in our ceremonies.

Third, the Great Law of Peace was taught to us by the Peace Maker. The implementation of the Great Law by the Peace Maker provided a form of governance, law, order, sovereign rights, and self government for the Haudenosaunee. The Great Law established what we call the Good Mind, which is how someone aligns their own thinking to the laws of the Creator and the Peace Maker. The foundations of the Good Mind are three principles: peace, righteousness and strength. The white pine - the Great Tree of Peace - represents these laws and the spiritual laws of the universe.

The Great Law was followed by the *Gasweñhda'* and the Covenant Chain of Peace. The *Gasweñhda'* or Two Row Wampum is an agreement describing how the European newcomers and the Haudenosaunee would live in peace while pursuing parallel but separate paths of culture, religion, and government. The ideal of the *Gasweñhda'* was balanced by the practical solution of the Covenant Chain, which implemented a real world setting for the *Gasweñhda'* through a series of treaties. These treaties noted how practical matters of trade would be confirmed by spiritual and political commitments by both sides. The Covenant Chain obligated the newcomers to the Haudenosaunee just as the treaty, which visually represents the Covenant Chain, obligated the Haudenosaunee to their new allies. The principles of the Covenant Chain are peace and friendship, and these were meant to last forever. When official meetings are held today we are polishing the Covenant Chain.

Finally, there is the *Gaihiwiyóh*, the spiritual message delivered by Handsome Lake to our people beginning in 1799. This message defines how the Haudenosaunee will perpetuate our culture and beliefs while continuing to live in peace with the newcomers. In a very practical way, *Gasweñhda'* teaches the Haudenosaunee how we can continue all the lessons that have come before: the Original Instructions, the Great Law, the *Gasweñhda'*, and the Covenant Chain. We see each step in our history as consistent with what happened before, as we balance the changing physical realities we see around us with our spiritual ideals, beliefs, and obligations.

History and law, to the Haudenosaunee, incorporate all of these elements which cannot be isolated or limited to the legal concepts of the federal, state or provincial governments, executive actions or court decisions. In fact, as a sovereign people, the Haudenosaunee firmly believe that the laws of these outside entities do not apply within the territories of our member nations. We continue to operate under our own set of laws as best we can in order to push forward traditional law and understanding for the benefit of the Seventh Generation to come.

Discipline of the Good Mind

Copyright Freida J. Jacques - revised 9/19/2000 - Onondaga Nation

Thousands of years ago, at a time when our people were in the midst of wars and pervasive violence the Peacemaker came and brought us a message of love and peace. One of the gifts he brought to us at that time was the concept of the Good Mind (*Ga'nigohíhi-yóh*). As children grow up in our Nation they hear the words "use a good mind" many times. I felt that a deeper explanation of what using the Good



Kent Lyons

We continue to operate under our own set of laws as best we can for the benefit of the Seventh Generation to come.