

# History of the Simcoe County Region

## Indigenization Column: May 17, 2017

If anyone has been to the Simcoe County Museum on Highway 26, they will have seen the beautiful Huron-Wendat artifacts and replica longhouse they have on permanent display. With all the discussion around Anishnaabeg (Ojibwe people) and the Anishnaabemowin (Ojibwe language) program, many may be confused as to why there are different nations in the same region. Hopefully, I can shed some light on this question.

This region was once inhabited by the Huron-Wendat nations, until about 350 years ago. The Huron-Wendat are a confederacy of five Haudenosaunee-speaking (Iroquois) nations. They are the; Attinniaonten ("people of the bear"), Hatingeennonniahak ("makers of cords for nets"), Arendaenronnon ("people of the lying rock"), Atahontaenrat ("two white ears" i.e., "deer people") and Ataronchronon ("people of the bog"). These nations had once been as far south as the Virginias and Ohio Valley, but had settled in this region pre-contact. These nations came into contact with the French settlers in the early 1600s, and it was this contact that caused a great deal of epidemics such as measles, influenza, and smallpox amongst the nations. The term 'Huron' comes from a demeaning nickname for the nation, which means 'boar's head' in French and was used in reference to ruffians. The Wendat were enemies of the five Haudenosaunee nations (later joined by the Tuscarora in 1722 and became the Six Nations we know today). By the mid-1600s the Wendat population had been reduced by half, from approximately 20,000 to 9,000 by the epidemics brought by the French settlers living in close quarters with the nations. Their villages were built with longhouses, which were occupied by extended families, with a matrilineal family structure belonging to one of eight clans. As in Anishnaabeg culture, individuals do not marry within their clan, in Wendat (Haudenosaunee) culture the children belong to their mother's clan.

The Wendat were trading partners with their northern neighbours, the Anishnaabeg, as well as others across the Georgian Bay area. These tribal groups were largely allies of the French, and were traditionally in alliance against the Haudenosaunee to the south, who were allies of the British. In the 1600s, the Wendat were the largest and most profitable fur trading partner to the French, which also meant an influx of Jesuit missionaries in the region, which explains the artifacts and settlement at Sainte Marie among the Hurons in Midland. During this period, the resources for the fur trade began to dry up, worsening first in the southern regions inhabited by the Five Nations. The Five Nations attacked the Wendat in 1649, some historians argue that the Five Nations attacked the Wendat for economic reasons, while the Haudenosaunee maintain that it was an attempt to reclaim numbers lost during the epidemics that had decimated their populations. Regardless, the Five Nations moved into Wendat territory, dispersing the populations in this region. Some joined the Five Nations, some moved north to join their Anishnaabeg trading partners, some moved east to what is now known as Wendake, located in Quebec City, while others returned south to Ohio and Michigan, who were then pushed further south in the 1840s to Kansas and Oklahoma by the US federal policy of forced Indian removal, where they are called Wyandot.

The Haudenosaunee Five Nations remained in the area of Simcoe County for approximately 50 years, before the Anishnaabeg nations pushed them back south and settled in this territory. The Anishnaabeg have been in this region since the late 1600s and are the majority of First Nations in this territory.

The Anishnaabeg are a large nation comprised of the Odawa, Ojibwe/Chippewa, and Pottawatomi peoples. The term Anishnaabe is often used as a synonym for Ojibwe, but also refers to the larger group of the Three Fires Confederacy (Odawa, Ojibwe, and Pottawatomi) Algonquin nations. The Anishnaabeg traditional territory ranges from Alberta to Ontario in Canada and into Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota in the United States. The territory goes as far north as James Bay in Ontario, surrounding which is Cree territory. A great deal of these migrations occurred during the fur trade as a result of the dispersals of communities during colonization. There are a variety of dialects within the Anishnaabeg language family, as well as various cultural nuances.

Many Anishnaabeg moved south into the southern Ontario region following the dispersal of the Wendat nation and also moved into Minnesota and Wisconsin following the dispersal of the Dakota nation in that area. Migration and resettlement was common along the borders of all Anishnaabeg territory, as some blended with their Cree neighbours to become what is now known as Oji-Cree as well as to the West becoming Plains-Ojibwe or Saulteaux nations.

In researching the history of Anishnaabeg communities in Ontario, the issue of treaties arises. There are two types of treaties in Canada; pre-confederation and post-confederation. Pre-confederation treaties were signed between the sovereign First Nations and the Crown, whereas post-confederation treaties were signed between First Nations and Canada. From the Indigenous perspective, treaties were spiritual ceremonies intended to forge lasting peace between two nations. To understand this viewpoint, look to the aforementioned blending of communities that resulted in confederacies and allegiances. Indigenous people formed loyalties with other nations to ensure safety and support, and the treaty relationship was viewed as akin to the Five Nations Confederacy or the Three Fires Confederacy, and was not seen as a signing away of rights and freedoms. Indigenous nations are also verbal language-based, meaning that the majority of Indigenous perspective in these signings were not recorded in writing in the same way that the Europeans recorded their legal viewpoints. These Indigenous versions of treaties are now passed down and honoured solely through traditional oral histories and are not viewed as legally binding today.

The pre-confederation treaties in this region were defined by the Royal Proclamation of 1763, as a means to define British government in the lands ceded by France to the British Crown after the Treaty of Paris and the Seven Years War. It included stipulations on how to negotiate with the Indigenous populations, "And whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to our Interest, and the Security of our Colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected, and who live under our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are reserved to them, or any of them, as their Hunting Grounds." (Royal Proclamation of 1763) It is of interesting note that this proclamation incensed the 13 Colonies, as it appointed a large portion of the land to the Indigenous populations, and was one of the root causes of the American Revolution. Not all nations signed treaties, and as such, have used the Royal Proclamation as a means to defend and maintain their sovereignty,

there are 5 unceded First Nations in Ontario. The Royal Proclamation was later superseded by the Indian Act of 1876 and the British North America Act of the same year. These two pieces of legislation relocated Indigenous territories under the control of the Canadian Federal Government and created the reserve system we know today. The Royal Proclamation is still found in Canada's Constitution Act of 1982 and is also referenced in Section 25 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

There are eleven pre-confederation treaties signed, including Upper Canada Treaties, the Robinson Treaties, the Douglas Treaties, and the Selkirk Treaty. The pre-confederation treaties signed in this region were the Robinson-Huron Treaty (North Bay-Sault Ste. Marie-Kirkland Lake area) and Robinson-Superior Treaty (Armstrong-Thunder Bay-Chapleau-Wawa) in 1850. Post-confederation treaties are generally numbered, but also have colloquial names. The Simcoe County Region is located within the Southern Ontario Treaties of 1764-1862 and the Williams Treaties of 1923.

More specifically the Tri-Council of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, and Beausoleil First Nation (Christian Island) are represented in the Coldwater-Narrows Specific Claim, originating from the forced removal of the three groups from the Coldwater-Narrows reserve in 1836. The Coldwater-Narrows reserve was created by Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada Sir John Colborne in 1830, to relocate Indigenous peoples in the region in one area. The Coldwater-Narrows reserve was situated on 10,000 acres between Lake Matchedash and Lake Simcoe. The three nations that were settled on the reserve were headed by Chief Snake, Chief Assance, and Chief Yellowhead. In 1836, the lands were sold to a third party, and the three groups were moved off the land. Chief Snake and his people settled on Snake Island, before relocating to Georgina Island in the 1860s due to population growth. Chief Assance and his people moved to Christian Island, and Chief Yellowhead and his people relocated to Rama First Nation. The Coldwater-Narrows specific claim became official in 1991 and settled in 2012. As a note, the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation also joined the claim in 2008.

The Anishnaabeg nations located in this area are the descendants of the three nations once situated on the Coldwater-Narrows reserve. They are now known as the Chippewa Tri-Council, and their First Nations are located in the areas surrounding Georgian College's Barrie, Orillia, Midland, Collingwood, and Orangeville Campuses.