

23 | Made in Akwesasne

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Introduction

THE MOHAWK COUNCIL of Akwesasne Aboriginal Rights and Research Office welcomed the opportunity to provide a paper for the "Pendergast Volume." We believed this to be an appropriate occasion to present the chronology of Akwesasne's experience and add it to the record of greater archaeological experiences that most Aboriginal peoples on this continent have had to contend with. Another motive in our presentation is to emerge from the grieving process caused by what we regard as archaeological colonialism and to activate a reconciliation process between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

That said, we took this as an opportunity to provide our evolving view of the discipline and the possibility of building a new approach to archaeology that would suit Akwesasne's current needs for cultural resource management. Our "Made-in-Akwesasne"¹ approach to cultural resource management proposes some ideas on the possibility of Akwesasne's forming new and equitable relationships with institutions and agencies charged with archaeological responsibility and the protection of cultural resources. We believe that there can be substantial new energy dedicated to the promotion of reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and the archaeological community.

Previously published (with modification) in *A Passion for the Past: Papers in Honour of James F. Pendergast*, ed. J. V. Wright and J.-L. Pilon, 435-53, Mercury Series, Archaeology Paper no. 164 (Gatineau, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2004), 435-53. Printed with permission by Salli M. Kawennotakie Benedict.

1. *Akwesasne* is a Mohawk word that means "Land where the Partridge Drums." Our oral history says that the loud roar of the rapids that once existed near Akwesasne, at what is now known as Long Sault, could be heard for great distances, far in advance of our approach to the area. It is said that the sound of the rapids under freezing ice sounded like the drumming sound that emanates from the chest of a partridge in its spring courtship rituals.

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We look for those who have similar interests in assuring the preservation and perpetuation of Aboriginal cultural properties, to build a relationship with Aboriginal people and Akwesasronen as their *confrères*.

Lt. Col. James Pendergast crossed paths with Akwesasronen from time to time, in his pursuit of archaeological knowledge. His archaeological work took him throughout Akwesasne Aboriginal territory from the 1950s through the 1970s. Regarded as an archaeological and historical expert on this geographic area, he continued to provide expertise and consultation to his colleagues and to Mohawks of Akwesasne until he passed away in September 2000.

We remember his name and his work because he introduced himself to our people. That was an important step for us, given the number of archaeologists that had utilized our territory for study without our knowledge. We first met Mr. Pendergast when a reburial of human remains was necessary in the 1960s. He later developed some friendships, built over time, with some of our leadership and traditional faith-keepers. We used him as a sounding board and wellspring of information when we explored the relationship of our people today with our ancestors long-passed. Some of his information was useful to us, even though we still continue some well-warranted skepticism of most non-Native interpretations of "the past."

In May 2000, the Akwesasne community hosted the 8th North American Fur Trade Conference—the conference theme being "Aboriginal People in the Fur Trade." Breaking from the traditional format of earlier conferences, this conference welcomed oral and written presentations as well as demonstrations by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who provided various perspectives on the role of Aboriginal people in the history of North America during the fur trade period. Mr. Pendergast delivered a paper on the fur trade on the Ottawa River, 1610–50, incorporating the great contribution of Aboriginal people to the history of the region.

History is not owned by Euro-North American cultures or by the culture that writes it down. This conference succeeded in respectfully bringing Aboriginal and Euro-North American perspectives together at one meeting. We are pleased that so many renowned scholars and academics also thought it was time to hear the Aboriginal voice in history. It is our hope that the voice of Aboriginal culture will become more audible in many disciplines. Aboriginal peoples will work to build their capacity in history, archaeology, and many other fields, as they have in many other avocations, as part of their nation-building efforts.

We expect that the voice of numerous Aboriginal nations will become more prominent in the critical review of archaeological and cultural resource management issues and in the formation of new practices, policies, standards, and laws that affect them.

Lt. Col. Pendergast had time in his final years to sit at our kitchen tables, to eat and to discuss our respective theories. We didn't always agree, but he did leave

with a great respect for our determination, our cultural philosophies, and our concept of being part of an ongoing culture, built on ancient beginnings. He agreed that we have a right to preserve the continuity and relationships that we have with our ancestral predecessors. In his later years, we felt more comfortable with him when we talked of archaeology and history from our differing perspectives. It is too bad that this kind of dialogue didn't start years before. It's not too late. It is in this spirit that we bring our ideas to this volume (Wright and Pilon 2004).

All Is Relative

We introduce a variety of aspects of Akwesasne being, that we believe are essential and related to our view of cultural resource management and archaeology. It is our hope that others will learn to know us and how we feel about cultural resource management, by our description of our ourselves and our territory, our laws and protocols, our history with archaeologists, our responsibility to the territory, our deeply entrenched relationship to everything in Creation and to the place we call Akwesasne. We believe this approach will allow others to understand what we recommend for the future of archaeology at Akwesasne and perhaps elsewhere.

Akwesasne Aboriginal Territory

Akwesasne is Aboriginal territory utilized by Kaniienkehaka/Mohawk people since time immemorial.² It is located along the Kaniatarowanenneh,³ or St. Lawrence River, and encompasses mainland territory about 20 miles deep along the north and south shore of this great river, historically extending from around present-day Kingston, Ontario, to Montreal, Quebec. The Aboriginal territory at Akwesasne includes the great river and its tributaries, wetlands, and marshes; hundreds of islands and islets; and the diverse and abundant natural life that is part of this riverine ecosystem. Akwesasne also includes the people of Akwesasne, past, present, and future.

When we say "time immemorial," we assert that our use, occupation, and fundamental relationship with this area known as Akwesasne, as well as our memories of kinship lines, goes beyond our earliest collective memories. The long-time relationship that we have with this ancient region is one that we convey as kinship to the land and to the ancestors before us that were born of this land.

Our relationship with the land is fundamental to our cultural survival. We say that the land is our mother. We are born of her and are returned to her. We consider our relationship with the land to be a sacred one.

2. *Kaniienkehaka* is a Mohawk word that means "People of the flint or crystal." It is the word that we use for describing the Mohawk people or the Mohawk Nation.

3. *Kaniatarowanenneh* is our Mohawk word for the St. Lawrence River. It means "Great River."

Today,⁴ Akwesasne is Kaniienkehaka/Mohawk territory along the Kaniatarowanenneh, or St. Lawrence River.

Even though we have a long history of use and taking by the Mohawk people, our oral tradition, and contemporary relationships with the territory that is part of our makeup, since people have lived here.

Our Mohawk people have lived with the environment and activities of a people for generations from external relations after generation 1. The Mohawk people treat of the ice sheet area once the area was open. We create the woodlands and relationships and the traditional territories by Akwesasne in the past.

Akwesasne is every responsibility for its fruits, its inheritance, its knowledge of the territory, its ability of protection for future generations after us.

Dr. Erica-Irene

4. Mohawk Nation is in North America, but the Mohawk people live here. One of the Mohawk people is a European-spawned nation. The boundary between the Mohawk people and the community life is the Mohawk people.

Three Mohawk people are the Mohawk people of Chiefs is the Mohawk people in Canada "fire" or seat of the Mohawk people.

By the late 18th century, the Mohawk people elected a government for that portion of the Mohawk people of Akwesasne. The Mohawk people of this con-

5. *Akwesasne*

Today,⁴ Akwesasne is the name of the contemporary community of Kanienkehaka/Mohawk people who live on islands and the mainland along the Kaniatarowanenneh, much diminished from its original expanse and character.

Even though our traditional territorial base has been diminished by historical use and taking by others, we have kept and continue to upkeep our historical ties, our oral tradition, and our traditional and naturalized knowledge of our ancient and contemporary homeland. The Kaniatarowanenneh region (and the Aboriginal territory that is part of it) has included Akwesasronen⁵ as part of its environmental makeup, since people could inhabit the land.

Our Mohawk place names record our ancient sites, activities, and relationship with the environment here. Some of our Mohawk place names record the purposes and activities of ancient sites. Our oral traditions are maintained and often guarded from external review. Some of the stories that have been transferred generation after generation record the first human habitation of this region and record the retreat of the ice sheet and the succession of plant and animal life that reinhabited this area once the area rebounded from the weight of the ice. Our ancient songs still permeate the wood of the Longhouse where ceremonies are dedicated to our ancient relationships and responsibility to Creation. Our people maintain knowledge of the traditional territory and a strong bond with the place and people encompassed by Akwesasne in all phases of its existence.

Akwesasne is special and is not like any other. Perhaps that is the way that every responsible culture feels about their territory. Its unique character, its stories, its fruits, its inhabitants, its habitats, its cycles, and its other attributes are the knowledge of the people who are born of the land and entrusted with the responsibility of protecting, preserving, and perpetuating the knowledge of this territory, generation after generation.

Dr. Erica-Irene Daes (2000) illustrates the important connection that traditional

4. Mohawk Government at Akwesasne: Akwesasne preexists Canada and the United States of America, but the historical development of these two countries has made serious impacts upon the community here. One of the greatest impositions is the international boundary made by these two European-spawned nations that artificially dissects this ancient Mohawk territory. The interprovincial boundary between Canada's Quebec and Ontario provinces adds further jurisdictional complications to the community life of the people here.

Three Mohawk governments have sprung from this community. The ancient *Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs* is the national and historic government of the Kanienkehaka people. Several Mohawk communities in Canada and the United States constitute the Mohawk Nation with Akwesasne being the "fire" or seat of the Mohawk Nation government.

By the late 1800s, the imposition of Canadian and U.S. laws at Akwesasne forced non-Aboriginal-style elected governments upon the people. The *St. Regis Tribal Council* is the community government for that portion of Akwesasne that is geographically situated on the "American" side. The *Mohawk Council of Akwesasne* is the community government for Akwesasronen and is situated on the "Canadian" portion of this community.

5. *Akwesasronen* is our Mohawk word for "People of Akwesasne."

peoples have to the land and the interrelatedness of all aspects of Creation to their survival. As to their tenacity and will to manage the land and all of its inclusions, she says:

The old ceremonies, songs and names kept people tied to the land, and continually reminded people of their responsibilities. Strip away the ceremonies, symbols and knowledge from the land, or sell them off, and people will no longer feel responsible for the land. The heritage of a people is deeply rooted in their traditional territory. Heritage is not only a reflection and a celebration of a people's territory—it is a management system for the territory, and separating heritage from the land may have serious adverse ecological and social consequences.

When the environment has been severely impacted by forced manipulation and change, the Akwesasronen and all other elements of Creation also suffer and struggle to recover from its short- and long-term impacts. When ancestors or the goods of our ancestors are removed from the land, it takes away some of the sacred responsibilities that Akwesasronen have to the land. It is a grievous intrusion on our culture. We do not let the goods of the past be taken willingly. It causes us great sorrow. The loss of this responsibility is one that we grieve for a long time and surely has long-term effects on our society. We do not know all of the social impacts that this loss has on our people in the short and long term, but we have surely seen some of them. When cultural properties are removed from our responsibility we do not give up. We wait and we ponder a time of their recovery, sometimes passing the responsibility for waiting to successive generations of our people.

The Laws of the Land

Good laws and good people grow out of the land and the territory from which they are born. Man-made laws should support the natural laws of the land. That just makes sense. Haudenosaunee laws,⁶ for example, reflect the interrelatedness of our people with the land. This encourages an ongoing connection with the land and evokes responsible behavior that is necessary to keep a perpetual relationship.

Kaianerakowa—Great Law of Peace

Akwesasne people are one of several communities comprising the Mohawk Nation. The Mohawk Nation is one of six independent nations who were brought

6. *Haudenosaunee* is the common name used among the Seneca, Tuscarora, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk nations for the confederacy that was formed by the Peacemaker and accepted by our nations. The word means "People who make the Longhouse." The Mohawk word is similar and is *Rotinonsionni*.

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together by a man of peace to form the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy have accepted the Kaianerakowa or Great Law of Peace.⁷

Ohenten Kariwatekwen—Opening Address

The Kaianerakowa is a law that incorporates the management of our resources and within its articles. The Kaianerakowa incorporates the Ohenten Kariwatekwen or “words that come before all else,” which has become to be known as the Thanksgiving Address.⁸

The Thanksgiving Address is the method by which we open and close each meeting, ceremony, or gathering of peoples. It is our thanksgiving to the Creator for all of the elements of Creation. We say that the Creator gave specific and individual instructions to every element within Creation. We thank them individually for carrying on those instructions and characteristics as part of the great circle of life. Not lost from this Address is a constant reminder of our enduring responsibility as people within this universe, and our interconnectedness with all elements of Creation.

Ohkwaho Kaionwi ne Akwesasne—Akwesasne Wolf Belt

The land and the people are one. Dr. Erica-Irene Daeş (2000) writes that “[a] lawyer might refer to this concept as non-severability, which simply means that interrelated things should not be separated.”

This is a concept that is reiterated in many ways throughout Kanienkehaka culture. The Akwesasne Wolf Belt is but one of the methods (fig. 23.1).⁹ The Kaianerakowa and the Ohenten Kariwatekwen cited above reinforce the same concept.

Akwesasronen have a very special relationship with the territory they call Akwesasne. A belt known as the Akwesasne Wolf Belt, or Ohkwaho Kaionwi ne Akwesasne, was fashioned so that the people could record their ties to the land and give notice to others of the importance of Akwesasne to its people. We say that the Akwesasne Wolf Belt is like a charter, which was made to inform others about the new and unique character of the Akwesasne community. A written record of the meaning of the Akwesasne Wolf Belt has not been found. A description of a similar

7. *Kaianerakowa* is the Mohawk word that we use to mean the Constitution of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Nations. “The Great Law of Peace,” is the common English translation that we use today.

8. *Ohenten Kariwatekwen* are Mohawk words that mean “the words that come before all else.” We use words of thanksgiving to thank the Creator for all elements of Creation from the People to the Sky-world to the Creator. These words are used before every meeting, ceremony, or gathering of people. We say that it assists us to reach consensus or “one mind.”

9. *Ohkwaho Kaionwi ne Akwesasne* are Mohawk words that mean “Akwesasne Wolf Belt.” The Akwesasne Wolf Belt is the charter of the contemporary Akwesasne community.

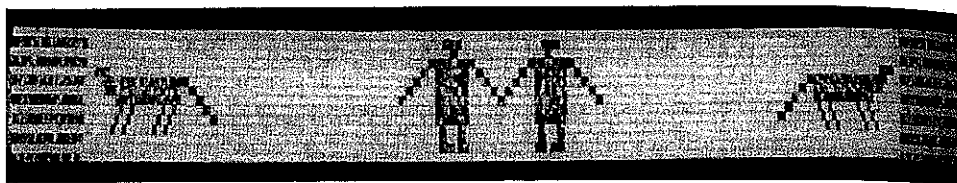


Fig. 23.1. Akwesasne Wolf Belt.

belt survives for a Kanienkehaka community that is a sister to Akwesasne: Kahnésataka. This written record, combined with oral accounts, serves to outline our own thoughts about the meaning of the Akwesasne Wolf Belt.

Agneetha, the principle man of the Mohawk village at Kahnésataka, at the Lake of Two Mountains, addressed Sir John Johnson, the superintendent general of Indian Affairs, on February 8, 1788, with several wampum to emphasize his speech. Among them was one that was similar to the Akwesasne Wolf Belt. We draw from those words and our own oral history to extrapolate the charter of the people of Akwesasne.

Agneetha said, "and as was the custom of our forefathers, we immediately set about making a belt, which was delivered to you, by which our children would see that the lands was to be theirs forever, and as was customary with our ancestors, we placed the figure of a (wolf) at each end of the belt to guard our property and to give notice when an enemy approached and as soon as it was finished, we spread it on the ground and covered it with dirt, that no evil minded persons should find it, where it remained undisturbed . . ."

We offer the following interpretation of some of the symbolism used by Agneetha as it relates to Akwesasne's Belt:

"And as was the custom of our forefathers, we immediately set about making a belt . . ." The first thing we speak of is the process of the community coming together. When Kanienkehaka people at Akwesasne felt that they were safe enough to use this part of Kanienkehaka territory for community-style living, they set about making a belt to record their interest in the territory, and to make special consideration about their new community.

" . . . by which our children would see that the lands was to be theirs forever . . ." This speaks to our people's responsibility to the land, our children and our future. The land and a defined land base is essential for the survival of Kanienkehaka culture. The Akwesasne Wolf Belt assures the people that the land known as Akwesasne will be here for their present lifetimes and for the lifetimes of future generations. The Wolf Belt makes it known to others that certain territory has been marked for the exclusive use of the Akwesasne people, and that they expect others to respect these community boundaries. The Wolf Belt provides its people a sense of security and reminds them that they have the responsibility to protect and preserve what is within the boundary.

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Because the land is to be theirs forever, they must make community plans and adopt methods and management systems that insure that the land is taken care of forever. Methods for long-range planning must be instilled in the mindset for every generation. Within Kanienkehaka culture we instill the responsibility in the present generation to make careful consideration of how their actions on the land will impact on the next seven successive generations. This is a responsibility that is handed to every generation and so it goes on "in perpetuity."

In effect the Akwesasne Wolf Belt becomes a declaration by the people that is part of their land management system. It is deeply rooted in their culture, and is a responsibility that is set in motion to last forever. "As soon as it was finished, we spread it on the ground and covered it with dirt." This speaks to the relationship of the people, to their laws, and to the land. They are inseparable. The Akwesasne Wolf Belt is covered with dirt to symbolize that the community, its laws, and the land are one. This is a very sacred concept. It means that the people and the land belong together. This is a bond as sacred as that of a mother to a child or as sacred as the connection we feel to our mother earth when we bury our dead.

Kaswentha—Two-Row Wampum

Traditionally, as Haudenosaunee people, we are taught to find the bridge between our cultures, so that we may have a relationship based on peace, friendship, and respect. For that, we have devised various methods by which European and Haudenosaunee cultures can interact as reasonable peoples.

We often offer the symbol of the Two-Row Wampum Belt, as the protocol which outlines the basis of an equitable relationship (fig. 23.2).¹⁰

The Two-Row Wampum Belt illustrates the concept of Haudenosaunee and European cultures traveling in separate vessels, down separate rivers, within the river of life. These are represented by two parallel rows of purple beads on a background of white.

We say that our vessel holds our culture, values, language, laws, practices, and all the things that we need to live as a people in this world. We say that the other vessel holds the culture, values, language, laws, practices, and entire way of living for Euro-North American people. We believe that both of these are valid ways of doing things, but that they must remain separate if each is to thrive and maintain a healthy relationship with one another.

The Two-Row Wampum Belt has three rows of white beads separating the two rivers of purple beads. Those beads keep us separate, but form a bridge between us. The three rows of white beads stand for peace, friendship, and respect. We believe that because we are reasonable peoples, that peace, friendship, and respect

10. *Kaswentha* is our Mohawk word for the Two-Row Wampum Belt.

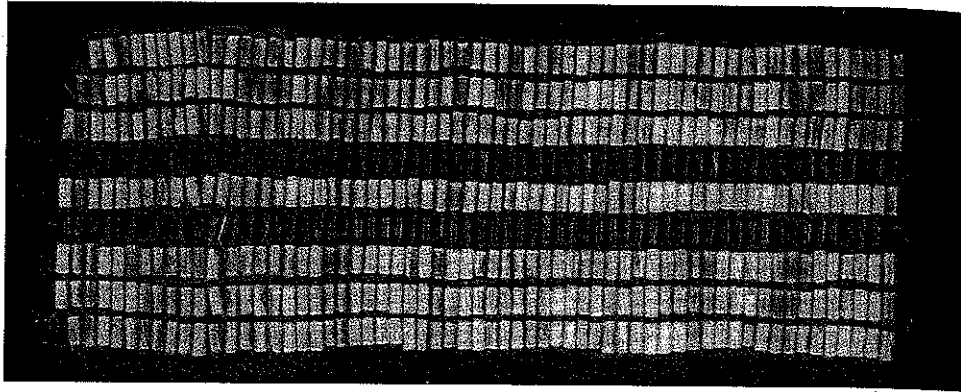


Fig. 23.2. Two-Row Wampum.

will insure our ability to maintain our distinct and separate characters, and also allow us to maintain our cultural strength that is essential in maintaining an ongoing relationship.

Archaeology as it has been practiced in North America has been justified by the values engrained in European culture. This system that was developed to search for knowledge of past cultures has overridden any cultural roadblocks placed on it by the Aboriginal nations who consider themselves the relatives of those whose history is in the ground.

This approach to gathering material culture for building a knowledge base contrasts greatly with the method in which our relationship with our people of the past is entrusted. When archaeology invades our territory or involves our culture, it crosses the line and imposes the values and reasoning of European culture upon ours. It is a very personal invasion. Euro-North American archaeology has represented an invasion of one culture upon another. Instead of building bridges, it creates great chasms of distrust. The value of the Two-Row Wampum protocol needs to be re-explored with archaeology in mind so that our two cultures can coexist in an environment of peace, friendship, and respect.

In Akwesasne, like some other Aboriginal communities, we recognize very few of the archaeologists that did work in our territory by name. That is because they never introduced themselves to us. As living people, and heirs of the cultures being studied, we have felt abstracted and inconsequential to the work of the archaeologists. The Canadian government laws and policies were not of any help to us because they did not obligate the archaeologists to communicate with us, let alone gain our permission. With no requirements for them to meet with us, they came to our territory and invaded the earth, taking cultural material to their museums, institutions, and storage facilities, backing up their reputations with voluminous records and published works.

Akwesasne is a community within the Mohawk Nation. Akwesasronen believe

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that Mohawk laws on Mohawk land are paramount. When dealing with Akwesasne cultural properties, Akwesasne culture, values, language, practices, and laws must apply. It is right that all respect and reciprocity should be given to the laws of the Aboriginal people of the land. It is time to review the Two-Row protocol so that each culture stays within the boundaries of its own vessel.

Sacred Trust Responsibility

Akwesasne holds the bones, the stones, and other evidence of our cultural existence and our continued being. Our recent relatives are buried here and so are the ancient relatives that we also know as our ancestors. Our people respect death and the journey that is taken by the deceased. Our responsibility is to all those before us to insure that their journey is uninterrupted. It is our responsibility to keep the people in the ground where they are becoming one with our mother the earth.

The people of Akwesasne recognize the importance of protecting and preserving the cultural legacy left to us by our ancestors and predecessors. This legacy and the gifts that they gave us insures that we will continue to survive as a people, strong in tradition, values, and culture. As a conscientious people, we understand that it is our responsibility and duty to care for the cultural objects of our ancestors and predecessors. We look on this responsibility as a Sacred Trust that will be carried by us and continually reinforced in our teachings for those yet to come.

The people of Akwesasne developed cultural resource management practices independently from those archaeological principles of Euro-North American design. We reject those principles of other cultures that impinge upon our Sacred Trust responsibility. Our cultural principles reiterate our responsibility for perpetual management of the cultural resources of the people who came before us and for taking responsibility, in each of our lifetimes, for protecting the remains and goods of the people of the past. We are born with a Sacred Trust Responsibility. We say that we have been practicing cultural resource management on our Aboriginal territory since the first of our ancestors were on this land.

Archaeologists have made a lasting impression at Akwesasne: The mysterious authority by which archaeologists have entered Akwesasne Territory, off and on, for almost 200 years has left an impression on us.

The reasons that we have heard from the archaeological community for unearthing the remains and goods of our ancestors and predecessors have left an impression on us. The manner in which the remains and goods are treated when they are removed from their ancient resting places has left an impression on us. The reports that we have heard in our conferences and meetings with other nations of Aboriginal people, over many years about their experiences and the treatment by the archaeological community to our cultural properties have left an impression

upon us. The great ends to which Akwesasne and other Aboriginal nations must go, to have these goods returned, have also left a lasting impression on us.

The impressions made upon us do not easily disappear. Today we track the source of those impressions and follow them like footprints to their source, leading us to the records and repositories, and to agencies and institutions in Canada and the United States and elsewhere around the world. We are obliged to pursue the recovery of our cultural properties and have them returned to our care.

Archaeology at Akwesasne

Excavation, removal, collection, and display occurred at Akwesasne just as it did in other sites of Aboriginal occupation outside of Akwesasne. Cultural properties were stolen, graves were robbed, human remains were removed from their resting places, artifacts were traded and sold, and large collections of our cultural properties were held and continue to be held in private collections and museums.

The details of these stories shall remain safe from human consumption, because we believe it would only desecrate our ancestors and disturb the living.

We summarize by saying that archaeology at Akwesasne was well underway in the early 1800s, by those who had leased land in our community. Surface collecting became the "Sunday" occupation of pot-hunters and other curio collectors. By the late 1800s ancient mounds were excavated, unbeknownst to our people at the time, and removed to repositories that we still have not yet located. Some ancient burial places were utilized for recreational purposes without Mohawk consent. The Mohawk are currently pursuing negotiations to regain this land.

Those amateur and professional archaeologists who roamed the Akwesasne territory from the 1800s through the 1970s investigating particular sites were not invited by Akwesasne or even introduced to our people. Oftentimes they carried out their work on remote islands or on the mainland within our territory, without our knowledge. Some of the collectors who were provided land leases approved by Indian Affairs resided on our islands and over the years they accumulated extensive collections. Some were farmers, who found artifacts when they ploughed the fields and later sold their collections as a "cash crop." Only now with investigation are we beginning to discover the extent to which archaeological excavation, collection, and removal was done at Akwesasne.

Affiliated with various universities in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere, anthropologists and archaeologists have flooded to our community and our sister communities seeking out our Elders, leaders, and traditional peoples, recording devices in hand. Sometimes the names are remembered, sometimes not. The products of their work rarely find their way back to us directly, but when by happenstance we come upon their published works, sometimes several years later, we have often been surprised and disappointed with the attributions and conclusions that are made from our interview sessions.

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Sometimes archaeological work, on a grand scale, was authorized and permitted within our community by Canadian and American government departments and agencies. Those few times that we were notified that archaeological work was occurring gave us little comfort. Even though we were notified about the archaeology that was done during the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway in the 1950s that ravaged numerous Akwesasne islands, it was done without our consent. The expediency of the Seaway gave license to archaeology to go to extraordinary means to extract and remove ancient objects and human remains to repository sites far away from Akwesasne.

The construction of the Seaway was devastating to our people on many levels. The ecosystem that we had depended on for survival was artificially altered. The great Kaniatarowanenneh that gave us life was muddied and the life habitat of the river was devastated. There were many fronts for our people to fight on all at once.

Some might ask why there were so few protests regarding archaeological excavation at the time that it happened. Most times our people were not aware of the situation at all. When they were, there was little that could be said. The late 1800s through to the 1950s was not a time of Indian¹¹ protest about such things. It was felt by some of our Elders that protests had the potential of bringing more attention to the matter and perhaps greater inhumanity to the situation. Our people remained quiet, unequipped at that time to wrest the problem.

Waiting for a Changing Attitude in Archaeology

Archaeology in the Akwesasne community does not have a historical relationship that is built on trust or mutual respect. That is too bad, but that is history.

Generally speaking of course, our image of archaeologists, whether stereotypical or not, are those academics who have worked to study ancient aboriginal cultures, ripping into the land collecting burial goods, human remains, and artifacts, building their own reputations without regard for the living aboriginal cultures who have a cultural bond with these goods. Some of our people have even wondered if they believed in the Creator.

At Akwesasne we found that our own people became more secretive and private about any information regarding cultural properties and sacred sites. The transmission of cultural information regarding the places of our ancestors to successive generations of our own people has therefore become more guarded. This is not a good thing, and it has caused our own people to have to salvage some aspects of cultural knowledge from the brink of being lost.

Archaeology must be counted among the list of oppressive acts that have been

11. "Indian" is the name that used to be a popular reference to the Aboriginal nations of North America. The Canadian Department responsible for Aboriginal people is still known as Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

inflicted on Aboriginal cultures by Western civilization. Its effects are surely as oppressive and devastating to a culture as are relocation, confinement to reservations, or placement in residential schools. We believe that it is part of the process of cultural genocide. Akwesasronen facing oppressive situations firsthand have developed numerous coping and survival methods. Some have bought into the culture of the oppressor, some have lost their fighting spirit, and some have become angry and self-abusive. Unfortunately, sometimes, these traits are all we have to pass on to our children.

Fortunately, there are still some others who have waited and waited for more opportune times to make objections and to initiate change. Sometimes Akwesasronen have waited a whole lifetime, passing on the patience—for still more waiting—to our children. Akwesasronen wait for a new climate and new thinking in archaeological and cultural resource management. It is as slow as resolving land claims or as the resolution of residential school issues for its survivors, but it starts somewhere.

Roadblocks to Recovery

Archaeology, like other acts of subjugation, has made Akwesasronen feel oppressed, powerless, inadequate, and insecure about our knowledge of our own culture. Archaeologists historically have talked down to Akwesasronen when they are imparting their theories of the past. Their archaeological jargon prevails. Aboriginal people are largely part of the mysterious "prehistory" of North America, and "history" starts when European chroniclers take note of it. Sites are named after archaeologists or the non-Aboriginal persons who "discovered" the cultural properties and very little is solicited as the Aboriginal contribution to the knowledge base.

In the United States, after years of protest by Aboriginal people, a new law was enacted called the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAG-PRA).¹² This law gave a new opportunity for Aboriginal peoples to learn the whereabouts of their cultural properties that were held by federally funded institutions and then to seek their recovery. The act is filled with flaws, but the legislation did put into motion a method whereby a reunion between Akwesasronen and other Aboriginal peoples and their ancestors could occur.

In Canada there is no law for the repatriation of cultural properties, human remains, or objects of cultural patrimony. There are policies and practices of various government departments, agencies, and museums. They are all different and act independently of one another. Repatriation is done on a case-by-case basis, after the remains or cultural objects are discovered by Akwesasronen. Negotiation can be a slow process and it may not be equitable. The process appears to be biased toward the possessor. After all, they have the goods.

12. H.R. 5237, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, October 1990.

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We soon found out that there is no funding for the costs of the lengthy repatriation process for either the institution or the people who are seeking recovery. Searching for assistance to continue our own discovery, research, and repatriation efforts, we soon found out that there is no agency or federal department that is charged with repatriation as a specific responsibility. Somewhere between Heritage or Indian Affairs this subject needs to find a home. There is certainly no Canadian federal department advocating a systematic repatriation process. Aboriginal issues raised at Canadian federal roundtable discussions get a little more than lip service and the issues still go unattended. That's consultation for you.

Roadblocks always occur when Aboriginal peoples are seeking recovery of cultural properties. Some Canadian museums large and small and other agencies that have collected Aboriginal goods for many years had been hesitant about giving up cultural properties to Aboriginal peoples. In our earlier negotiations, some had even raised the issue of capacity, saying that Akwesasne and other Aboriginal communities do not have the expertise or proper facilities to care for the artifacts in the same way that they have. At Akwesasne, we have worked with various institutions to help them see that ours is a different capacity: knowledge and expertise. Cultural goods that are returned to us will not be treated in the same manner that they were treated within institutions because we are obliged to treat certain properties in prescribed ways and we are obligated to seek their return to our trust.

We should not be blindsided by the roadblocks. There are also some wonderful success stories. We can report that Akwesasne have seen many successful repatriations in the last few years from very small museums to some of the larger museums and institutions in both the United States and Canada. It takes diligence and cooperation on both sides. It takes good people with good principles on both sides. We were fortunate to have dealt with archaeologists, museum curators, and personnel that truly made a difference and expedited the process in many ways. They are the ones that keep human dignity at the forefront of their thoughts. Our gratitude goes to these special people.

Archaeological principles and definitions are presently not harmonized with the cultures that are being studied. Maybe that is something that can change. Arbitrary archaeological definitions for cultural affiliation currently separate Aboriginal peoples from their ancestors and are among several of the hurdles that are thrown up as obstacles to recovery.

Within what we know as Akwesasne Aboriginal Territory, many non-Native definitions conclude that we are not related to certain Aboriginal people that inhabited this territory before us. We say that we are. Our ancestors and predecessors are all from Akwesasne and they are all part of this same territory. We all came from the land here and are made of the land. We are all part of the mother earth at Akwesasne. We are made of her and we go back to her. We are definitely related.

These roadblocks are not unfamiliar to us. They are the same roadblocks that appear when land claims or Aboriginal rights issues are being tested. The first

thing that they try to break is our link to our ancestors, and our link to the land. At Akwesasne, one Canadian archaeologist was an expert witness in an Akwesasne Border Crossing case. His theory quickly hit the newspapers—"Mohawks Not Native to Canada"—and our natural response came the next day in "Mitchell says he's no immigrant."¹³ To some, the assertion that we are recent interlopers, arriving not much earlier than Europeans to North America, is the argument that is thrown in to break down our unique tie to the land and to our claims to Aboriginal title.

Roadblocks always arise when there is fear of changing from an old system to a new one. We encourage all those pursuing cultural resource management of their own properties to find the methods to surpass these roadblocks so that the cultural resources of our people can be managed in the manner that they were intended.

Capacity Building

When you review some of the roadblocks, it is not difficult to see why all of those bright Akwesasronen who pursued higher education by the 1970s did not find any use for archaeology as a field of study. Until recently, it would be abhorrent for Akwesasronen to come home from university with archaeological training or to pursue archaeology as a career.

Archaeology, which may have been the farthest career from our minds in the 1970s, 1980s, and even 1990s, may now have a place in our community. Some of our own attitudes regarding its value are changing.

Our land base has been diminished and our population is growing. We have the technology at Akwesasne to utilize land in ways that we never did before. It has become apparent that we too could become responsible for the inadvertent destruction of cultural properties that we have criticized others so vocally for. We can't assume that the archaeologists came and took everything away from Akwesasne already. And we can't cover our eyes to the issues of responsibility that are before us.

Building our "capacity" in cultural resource management sets us out on our own journey. We need to look at what has been done in Western archaeology. We need to look at new models. We need to look at what other Aboriginal communities have done. And then, we need to work to build something "Made in Akwesasne."

Because we know that we must protect the cultural properties of our people and our land, it might mean taking a look at what Western archaeology has learned. With help from some archaeologists we can learn about the sites within our Aboriginal territory. We can learn how to delineate sites. We can learn about modern site protection. We can explore their theories about our ancestors. We can learn the

13. "Mohawks Not Native to Canada," *Standard Freeholder*, Cornwall, Ontario, 1 Oct. 1996.
"Mitchell says he's no immigrant," *Standard Freeholder*, Cornwall, Ontario, 2 Oct. 1996.

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methodologies that were used in the past and the entire history of archaeology if we need it. This is knowledge that we can use as modern tools when we are building our own approach to cultural resource management. We don't necessarily need all the tools in the toolbox. That will be our choice, once we have chosen the design of the system that we need to build.

Our "capacity" in the archaeological field is only now beginning to build, and it is only by designing a study of archaeology built more on our culture and community-appropriate protocols that this field of expertise can find a home within Akwesasne. For us it means building an approach to the protection of cultural resources that is compatible with our existing cultural management systems. It also means taking a look at our own integrated cultural management systems to insure that they can survive and provide the essential ingredients for long-term caregiving. These are our language, our values, our ceremonies, our commitment to the land and to the people of the past, present, and future. It may mean that we have to build up all of the components of our culture to assure that cultural resource management can be done now and for the future, in the manner that is acceptable to this community.

Some of our "capacity" needs to be reinvented to meet modern concerns. In our culture, ceremonies for reinterment are not part of normal ceremonial structure. When repatriation of the remains of our ancestors occurs today, we must build appropriate culturally acceptable methods that we believe are proper for their reburial. This is all new to us and some of our work in recovery of cultural properties takes long discussion among our Elders and faith-keepers in order to build an appropriate modern practice. This new practice may require the retrofit of ancient practices to meet our contemporary needs. That is for us to decide.

Dr. Daes (2000) says "that, as long as a few fragments of their heritage and history survived in the memories and hearts of their elders, there was still hope of recovering what seemed to be lost. Indeed, he tells us, the generation that re-discovers its history and spirituality will be even more powerful than its ancestors."

We believe that recovery of cultural properties will strengthen the contemporary traditional culture of our people. The return of objects of cultural significance has a great impact on our social and cultural structure. It gives us back some dignity and it revitalizes various responsibilities and purposes. We say that it gives us back our spiritual strength.

We believe that cultural resource management can also help us close the gap between generations. At Akwesasne, Elders within our community are well respected for their cultural knowledge. Sometimes we worry that our young people can lose the valuable transmission of culture between the older and younger generations.

Dr. Daes (2000) says that "a people can lose its heritage in a single generation. People who neither respect nor value their heritage can lose it—or sell it off—in no time at all. It is futile to hoard your heritage in museums and books if your children

are ashamed of their parents and grandparents and only value what they see on television."

At Akwesasne, we have experienced losses in the transmission of culture from one generation to another. In the 1960s, we began to notice a severe loss in the strength of our Mohawk language, as external influences blocked our lines of transmission. What was nearly lost in one generation has taken us more than 40 years to begin to rebuild and we are not out of the woods yet. Because of that experience, we are mindful of the gap that grows between our youth and our Elders and we search for appropriate and successful adaptations that are surrogate infrastructures for the flow of cultural information from one generation to another. At Akwesasne, our museum and cultural centers have understood that culture is alive and must come out of the glass case and be part of the living and evolving culture of the land. These Akwesasne-based centers utilize methods that promote and perpetuate the culture. In this way they are cultural activists. That is the way to survival.

An approach to archaeology and cultural resource management has to be built so that it is accountable and subject to the scrutiny of the people whose ancestors are being studied. In Akwesasne's own community, we are accountable to ourselves and in our community governance initiatives we are obliged to build appropriate laws, policies, and best practices that instill the need for cultural resource management within our own administrative institutions. For instance, we have to reconcile protection of cultural properties with our need for land for housing, agriculture, and our own economic survival in a very limited land base. In our capacity building we need to take control and responsibility for the situation and take careful consideration of what we do today because of the impact it will have on our future.

In our "capacity building," we also need to take into consideration other issues within our own community. "Capacity building" means reinforcing a relationship between our contemporary elected community governments and our traditional cultural government based on common long-standing cultural principles and values. It means enacting contemporary enforceable laws and practices that are harmonized with traditional cultural principles and practices. And it means insuring that our young university graduates come home with the ability to blend their cultural knowledge with the technical skills and expertise that they bring to us from the outside.

We have different ways of saying things. We say that "Archaeology and the truth are not the same." Right now we do not hear our voice or truths in the archaeological story that is being told. Archaeological theories change all the time and our reasoning used to be more passive and we thought that sooner or later a theory will be developed that coincides more sensibly with our ancient stories, songs, place names, oral tradition, and other parts of the cultural archives that we utilize on a daily basis. We believe it is time to be a little more aggressive and offer our truths for examination. We believe that it is time to give recognition to other perceptions

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Looking externally, "capacity building" is expanding the relationship that we have with outside governments and agencies. We can begin by working together to build the proper protocols between us. Akwesasne needs to insure that Akwesasne's cultural resources are managed in a way that preserves human dignity. External governments may have other concerns. Somewhere there is a balance and a common place where we can work together on mutually agreeable principles, for the protection, preservation, and perpetuation of the cultural resources that we both believe are nonrenewable resources.

Some of the injuries of the past need to be healed and a method of reconciliation has to be found to address this issue. Reconciliation would be good for us all so that the new journeys that we take alongside each other in the river of life will be free from turbulence.

Made in Akwesasne

Made in Akwesasne is an appropriate name for a new cultural resource management strategy that will be developed within Akwesasne Territory. It comes from the people and territory whom it concerns. The artifacts were made in Akwesasne. Our ancestors are from Akwesasne. The archaeologists who came here received some reputation on their study of the cultural properties of Akwesasne. It is appropriate for our laws and protocols to apply to the properties of Akwesasne, whether they are still in our Aboriginal territory or removed to other locations.

Dr. Daes (2000) says that "[i]n international law, we refer to this as the principle of *lex loci*—that is 'the law of the place.' It is a very ancient principle among nations. It was recognized by the Roman Empire, and still applies to disputes over contracts, the ownership of private property, and family relationships, when the parties live in different countries."

One of our cultural ideologies is that "everything is related." It leads us to understand that the practice of archaeology or cultural resource management is part of an integrated management system. We need a strong language to carry out our ceremonies, and to address our ancestors. We need our ceremonies to insure our connection and respect for the natural world. We need our natural world to survive. We therefore cannot take our responsibility for cultural resource management lightly because of its potential ripple effect throughout our entire cultural system.

In reinventing a culturally appropriate type of archaeology, we have to insure that we challenge our reasons for the decisions that we make. We have to make sure that our reasons for excavating cultural goods are good reasons and that they stand up to cultural scrutiny. We need to deliberate with our Elders and cultural leaders

and agree on the acceptable reasons for intrusion upon the resting places of the past.

At Akwesasne, we are working through our reasons. We have accepted certain tasks as the needs arise. When it is decided that work must be done on a sensitive area, our young people are trained in archaeological field methods that we have adapted to suit our community sensitivity. A great deal of preparation time is provided to our youth in order to meet our cultural obligation. Faith-keepers and traditional leaders spend time with them to insure that they understand the gravity of the work that must be done. The youth who participate do so knowing the great responsibility that is placed upon them. They pledge to stay away from drugs and alcohol, and to keep a good mind. They are taught to touch and walk softly on the land, and to have respect for the environment and the living things around them.

At the site, tools in hand, our youth open the day with the Ohenten Kariwatekwen, spoken in Mohawk. That sets the tone for each day. Throughout the day, Elders talk to them about their culture. When goods are uncovered, good notes and photographs are taken and the site is GPS'd¹⁴ [located using a geographic positioning system]. The goods are carefully catalogued and then they are respectfully returned to the ground where they were found. At the end of each day a closing address is given in the Mohawk language.

Akwesasne Strategy

Akwesasne sees great value:

- in the organization of a roundtable between federal/provincial government departments/agencies and Aboriginal nations to discuss issues pertaining to protection of cultural properties, repatriation, and other related topics, with the view to developing appropriate enforceable mechanisms between our Nations' governments, leading to protocols, reciprocal arrangements, a repatriation law, and a responsible federal/provincial department/agency;
- in the development of a forum for the exchange of perspectives between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal cultural resource caregivers with a view to changing contentious policies and practices;
- in the reconciliation of Akwesasne and non-Akwesasne versions of human occupation within Akwesasne Aboriginal Territory;
- in the respect for Akwesasne's relationship with ancestors and predecessors;
- in making a place for Aboriginal perspectives in archaeology and history within the educational institutions of Canada utilizing Aboriginal educators;
- in placing a moratorium on the invasive analysis of human remains;

14. "GPS" stands for geographic positioning system in which an electronic tool provides geographic coordinates for the area located.

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- in building protocols with provincial and federal governments for any future archaeological field work within Akwesasne's Aboriginal Territory;
- in developing an Akwesasne Historic Preservation Office that would oversee cultural resource management within its Aboriginal Territory and review applications and issue permits for archaeological work within Akwesasne's Aboriginal Territory;
- in designating and protecting certain archaeological sites and landscapes within Akwesasne Aboriginal Territory;
- in building the capacity of Akwesasne for cultural resource management;
- in instituting interim and long-term management agreements, as part of the ongoing relationship between Akwesasne and museums and other repositories;
- in insuring that some of Akwesasne's cultural properties are returned immediately and others allowed to remain within the institution as the needs be with provisions for input as to care and access of cultural properties;
- in the setting aside of provincial/federal funds for the ongoing repatriation processes and related issues with regard to cultural resource management that are inevitable in Akwesasne;
- in the setting aside of provincial/federal funds to assist Akwesasne to reinforce language and culture as part of the cultural management system for the care and maintenance of cultural properties;
- in sensitizing the public mindset to respect Akwesasne sacred sites and objects.

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