

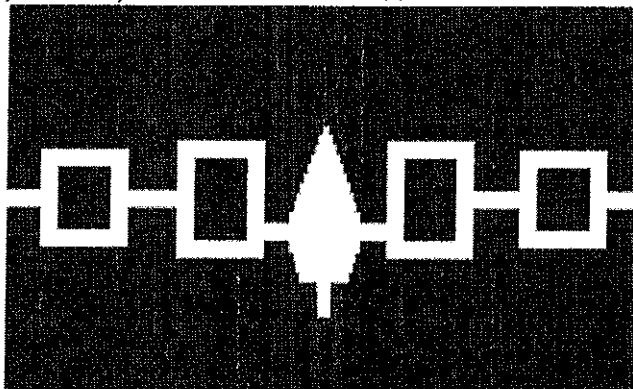
The Skä•noñh—Great Law of Peace Center as Collaborative Space at Onondaga Lake Park

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Introduction

As of January 1st 2013, the Onondaga Historical Association (OHA) took over management of the Onondaga County facility known as “Sainte Marie among the Iroquois” located on the eastern shore of Onondaga Lake. A new collaboration is currently planning to repurpose the facility into the Skä•noñh—Great Law of Peace Center. Skä•noñh, is an Onondaga welcoming greeting meaning “Peace” and “Wellness.”

Onondaga Lake is one of the most important places in the accounts of the founding of the Haudenosaunee, or “People of the Longhouse.”¹ More than 1000 years ago it was here that the Peacemaker, Haionwhatha and the Tadadaho came together, through the help of Jigonsaseh, a woman who lived among the Seneca, to establish what has been translated into English as “The Great Law of Peace.” This is an ancient ceremonial process and social protocol, which helps orient human beings toward respectful relationships with all beings, human and otherwise, who inhabit the natural world. The Longhouse is organized in to matrilineal clans who select their representatives in titles translated into English as Clanmother, Chief, and Faithkeeper. The Haudenosaunee are a confederation of six different nations. The original Five Nations are, from East to West (left to right), the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk. Below is a reproduction of the Confederacy Wampum Belt, or Haionwhatha (Hiawatha) Belt that depicts this relationship between the Five Nations. Onondaga is represented by the Tree of Peace in the middle, which is planted at the geographical Center, or heart, of the Haudenosaunee.



As such, Onondaga Lake is a sacred place for the Haudenosaunee. The Onondaga Nation, who are the Central Fire of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy remain among the last Federally recognized sovereign Indigenous peoples in the U.S., if not the World, who still govern themselves by their ancient ceremonial Longhouse practices. The “Great Law of Peace” has been continuously active from time immemorial until today. This tradition is reflected in the living community of the Onondaga Nation.

The influences of the Great Law of Peace is formally acknowledged by the United States (1987) as having inspired the Founding Fathers in the development of Western Democracy; instrumental in developing the United Nations; and contributing to the

¹ The Haudenosaunee are most often, and mistakenly, referred to as the “Iroquois,” or “Six Nations Iroquois.”

Women's Movement. In spite of its profoundly significant cultural importance, however, comparatively few people know about the Great Law of Peace. Over the last several decades, legislation, educational materials, cultural initiatives and museums have gradually been increasing been reorienting US citizens to their obligations to Indigenous peoples. The Center's focus, therefore, will be to educate primarily non-Haudenosaunee people from all walks of life to understand the continuing importance of the Great Law of Peace. It will instruct its visitors to appreciate how indigenous values came to influence our modern way of life and identity as "Americans."

Another theme of the Center will be the controversial nature of the cultural contact between Europeans and the Haudenosaunee. From the Haudenosaunee perspective the movement of Europeans through their territory created conflict. In addition to all the beneficial aspects of this relationship there were negative consequences as well. While "St. Marie Among the Iroquois" celebrated the colonial presence of the French in the 1650's, the new Center will look at the "missionary fort" from the perspective of the Haudenosaunee—and the Great Law of Peace—on the colonizing processes of Europeans, and European Americans, from first contact in 1613 until the present.

This effort will require the guidance of the Onondaga Nation leadership in collaboration with the many educational institutions and community organizations in the greater Syracuse area. These include Syracuse University, SUNY-ESF, LeMoyne College, SUNY-Empire State College, Onondaga Community College, and OHA. Also involved in the planning are a wide variety of other community groups and organizations including; the Syracuse Center of Excellence, the Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON), Onondaga Environmental Institute (OEI), Onondaga Shoreline Heritage Restoration (OSHR), and The Matilda Joselyn Gage Foundation, FOCUS, among others. The site is part of Onondaga Lake Park, which is owned by Onondaga County. The Onondaga Historical Association has contracted with Onondaga County to manage the site.

"History" based exclusively in the writings of non-Native American 'experts' has prohibited an authentic indigenous voice from being heard. Therefore, this center will focus on presenting the Great Law of Peace as told by the Haudenosaunee themselves, as an ancient yet living vital reality today. This will be the focus of future events at the Center, which currently include traditional lacrosse games-festivals; wampum readings; art projects; talks and conferences.

Planning Events:

There will be several events and programs at Skä•noñh Center throughout 2013 as we continue the planning process. These projects exemplify the perspective of the Center and what we want people to understand after having visited. Some of these events will be adapted as yearly events. All of them, however, will bring the Center to life and be orienting activities as we develop the message.

1. White Stone Canoe sculpture project:

The story of the Great Law of Peace features the story of the Peacemaker. He was born in the territory now referred to as the north shore of Lake Ontario. He carved a canoe of white stone, which he sailed across Lake Ontario in to Haudenosaunee country to bring a message of peace. During this time there was great upheaval for the Haudenosaunee who were embroiled in revenge killing practices. Through his journey he befriended Jigonsaseh, a woman who lived in Western New York.² He eventually met Hiawantha and lifted him out of

² Jigonsaseh's grave is near the Ganondagan State Historic Site, which is near Rochester New York (<http://www.ganondagan.org/haudenosaunee.html>). Native and non-native Iroquoianists of the 19th and 20th centuries locate her in the farther western regions of New York State.

his grief after having lost his daughters. Together they traveled to Onondaga Lake and engaged the fearsome Tadadaho. Together they established the Great Law of Peace at Onondaga Lake.

The White Stone Canoe is a vehicle for bringing the message of Great Law of Peace. Many years ago, sculptor Tom Huff (Seneca Cayuga) dreamed of sculpting a white stone canoe in honor of the Creator's messenger known as the Peacemaker. Here he called together the nations divided by war and bloodshed, and brought to them the Great Law of Peace, the foundation of the Haudenosaunee League. Tom has carried this dream with him for more than 20 years, hoping to find a home for his work to honor of the Great Law of Peace by situating it at the lake.

The White Stone Canoe will be a monumental art project that will be a focal point for the Skä·noñh—Great Law of Peace Center. The sculpture will be carved on the site and people will be able follow its progress online. Programing and social events will introduce people to the story of the White Stone Canoe, the Peacemaker and the Great Law of Peace.

2. Haudenosaunee Wooden Stick Lacrosse Game and Festival:

On 28-29 September 2013 the Skä·noñh—Great Law of Peace Center will initiate an annual Haudenosaunee Wooden Stick Lacrosse game and festival at Onondaga Lake Park. Lacrosse, which is called Deyhontsigwa'ehs (They Bump Hips) by the Onondaga, is a game that has been played at Onondaga Lake for thousands of years. It is part of the narrative of the formation of the Great Law of Peace. It is often called the Creator's Game because Haudenosaunee men are taught since birth that they play this game for the pleasure of the Creator.

Lacrosse is much more than just a sport for the Haudenosaunee. It is also played to support and promote the vitality of their community through a ceremonial game. While ceremonial games are not open to the general public, the games at Onondaga Lake will be played by Haudenosaunee men with wooden sticks and be available to be viewed by everyone. The festival will be an opportunity for non-Haudensaunee people to learn about the origins of the game from the Haudenosaunee peoples.

Like the story of the Great Law of Peace, or the Thanksgiving Address,³ lacrosse connects human beings to the world. It carries values of the Haudenosaunee that are often lost in the contemporary world of sports. We expect that lacrosse players and fans will be very interested in learning about the origins of the game they love. It will be an important vehicle for understanding the Indigenous worldview of the Haudenosaunee.

3. "Listening to the Wampum:"

On 15-16 November 2013 the Skä·noñh—Great Law of Peace Center with the Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse University and Le Moyne College will host a conference titled "Listening to the Wampum." The central focus of this event will be a reading of a wampum belt, which commemorates the coming of the Jesuits to Onondaga Lake in the 1650's.

The Skä·noñh—Great Law of Peace Center repurposes the old living museum called "St. Marie Among the Iroquois." St. Marie focused on the "missionary fort" that was built at Onondaga Lake. That encounter between the Jesuit missionaries and the Onondaga peoples

³ The Thanksgiving Address, or "Words that Come Before All Else," is an ancient protocol for addressing various beings throughout the world and cosmos. It is spoken in the Haudenosaunee language at the beginning and end of all meetings so that people attending will be oriented. Greetings are extended to People, Mother Earth, Water, Fish, Plants, Food Plants, Medicine Herbs, Animals, Trees, Birds, Winds, Thunderers, Sun, Moon, Stars, Teachers, and the Creator. This ancient protocol for the Haudenosaunee expresses the meaning of an Indigenous worldview.

has been taken solely from the Jesuit Relations. Historians regularly cite the "Relations" as a primary source for the early contentious contact between Europeans and Native Americans in the North East, but it excludes Indigenous perspectives.

The Onondaga Nation still maintains a wampum belt that records the history of this contact of the Jesuits and the Onondaga Nation at Onondaga Lake in the mid-17th century. This wampum belt is rarely, if ever, regarded in the history of this interaction. The Jesuit Relations are the sole source used. It is our intention, in collaboration with the Onondaga Nation leadership, who are the wampum keepers, to sponsor a reading and conference at Syracuse University, LeMoyne College, and the new Skä noñh—Great Law of Peace Center

The *Listening* conference would allow us to hear about the contact between Jesuits and Onondaga in 1653 and 1657-8 from the perspective of the Onondaga Nation. It also raises serious questions about what constitutes an authoritative version of history. We will bring together leaders from the Onondaga Nation including Oren Lyons, Irving Powless, and others who have done extensive research into other non-textual ways of recording history. We will then host a series of panels and workshops that include Haudenosaunee speakers, scholars in Native American oral tradition, and other historians to compare it with the Jesuit accounts and discuss the similarities and differences in perspective. This is a unique opportunity to better understand how historians can use oral histories as well as the role of collective memory in historic interpretation. It will provide a place for constructive dialogue about the past in the hope of encouraging better understanding of issues today related to Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural contact.

Conclusions:

The cultures of the United States and other post-colonial 'settler-states' around the world, have gradually been more appreciative of the Indigenous peoples in their midst. Colonialism was justified on a perspective of the "natural inferiority" of "primitive" or "savage" people. This had devastating consequences for Indigenous peoples around the world. This conquest mentality, however, has also had devastating consequences for the environment and now seems to have jeopardized our survival. There is a growing interest by people descendant from European colonists, who are more willing and intrigued by Indigenous peoples and their worldviews. In part this has to do with the urgency of a growing environmental crisis. In general most people understand that the conquest worldview is no longer viable.

The Haudenosaunee have had a tremendous impact on the development of democratic values of the West. Yet, this impact is largely unknown. We think the Skä·noñh—Great Law of Peace Center can have a tremendous influence on how we re-Imagine America. As we communicate the ancient Indigenous values of the Haudenosaunee to descendants of the immigrant colonists our intention is that a new set of orientations can be considered. Over the last 100 years or so the US has been gradually moving toward realizing that we need to work with the natural environment rather than against it. The Haudenosaunee still actively practice the harmonization of human activity with a living earth.

The Skä·noñh—Great Law of Peace Center will give visitors a view of art, sports, religion, history, and the earth from the perspective of the Haudenosaunee. We think it will be an invaluable experience for them and also a vehicle for the Haudenosaunee to communicate their perspective in a respectful and honest way.

For more information on Skä·noñh—Great Law of Peace Center please visit our website at <http://www.skanoñhcenter.org> or contact Phil Arnold at pparnold@syr.edu