

Otgoä·'

Wampum

By Dehowähda·dih - Bradley Powless

OTGOÄ'.

Otgoä' is the Onondaga word for what the English call wampum. Otgoä' or wampum is a very important part of Haudenosaunee life. It is used in ceremonies, meetings, as identification, as invitations, and used as a way to record significant events.

When the Europeans first came to our shores, they began communicating with us. The Europeans did notice that wampum was very important to us. They noticed that we used wampum during our meetings and when the meetings were finished, we made wampum belts to record what happened.

The Europeans knew that wampum was so important to us, they began to use otgoä' in trade with the Haudenosaunee. If they wanted our beaver, bear, or deer hides, they often brought strings of wampum to trade. This trade became so often that Europeans began to mistakenly think of wampum as a form of money. To the Haudenosaunee, wampum has always meant more than money.

We will read about just a few uses of otgoä'. We will also read about some wampum belts. There are many more wampum belts that were used to make agreements that aren't pictured here.

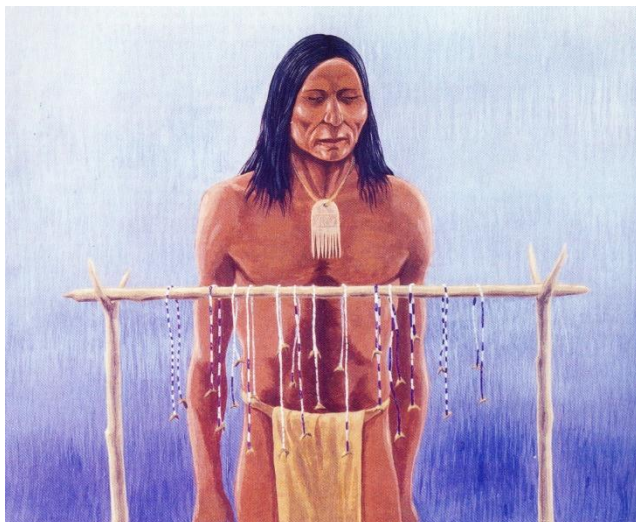


CONDOLENCE WAMPUM

The Condolence wampum recalls a time when the Haudenosaunee was being formed. Saddened by the death of his daughters, Hiawatha wanders and comes upon a lake covered with birds. The water birds then took flight. When they did, the birds lifted the water from the lake with them.

Hiawatha is then able to walk across the lake bottom. As he crosses the lake, he picks up the white and purple shells along the way. Once he reaches the shore, he strings the shells together. As he does this, he puts words into the shells to make him feel better. This is the first time we used otgöä·!

When Hiawatha meets the Peacemaker, the Peacemaker sees the sadness around him. The Peacemaker uses the wampum strings to make Hiawatha feel better. Since that time, the Haudenosaunee use these wampum strings to make people feel better after a person passes away. We wipe away the sadness from their eyes, ears, throat so they can feel better.



QUAHAUG

Along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean lives the quahaug, or clam. The meat of the quahaug is delicious to eat in soups, stews, or all by itself. The quahaug shell comes in two colors, purple and white.

It took a long time to make wampum beads. Indigenous people broke the shell into small segments. Then they sanded them into a tube-ish shape. The people took the tube and would use a hand drill to make a hole in the shell. They would drill the shell from both directions until you could see straight through the shell bead. When finished, you had one bead called otgoä' or wampum. Purple was highly valued as there wasn't a lot of purple in a single shell.

Trade between the nations for strings of wampum was highly valued. When the white brothers came, they began making wampum with metal drills which made the creation of a wampum bead much faster. The white people traded wampum like money because it was a highly valued trade item.

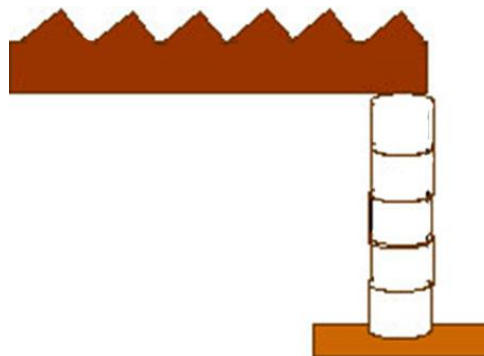


INVITATION WAMPUM

Invitation Wampum has an important use in the functioning of the government of the Haudenosaunee. Onondaga uses the Invitation Wampum to invite the other nations to meetings.

For a meeting, the Onondaga create an invitation wampum for each nation of the Haudenosaunee. The Invitation wampum is a string of 5 white wampum beads connected to a wooden stick. The wooden stick has notches to tell in how many days until the meeting will take place. The speaker tells the wampum what we are to meet and discuss about.

A runner takes the Invitation wampum to the other nations. When the runner gets there, the runner invites the nation and tell what the meeting is about. As each day passes, a notch is cut off the stick and when the notches are all gone, the meeting will take place at Onondaga. Each nation brings the wampum back at the start of the meeting.



IDENTIFICATION WAMPUM

Identification Wampum is also very important within the Haudenosaunee. Each position of Clan Mother or Chief has their own identification wampum. The identification wampum is a string of 5 white wampum shells tied to a piece of leather. When a person holds a title for the Nation, they carry the wampum to show their position within the Haudenosaunee.

When a leader falls, the title name of the position and the wampum is passed on to the next leader.

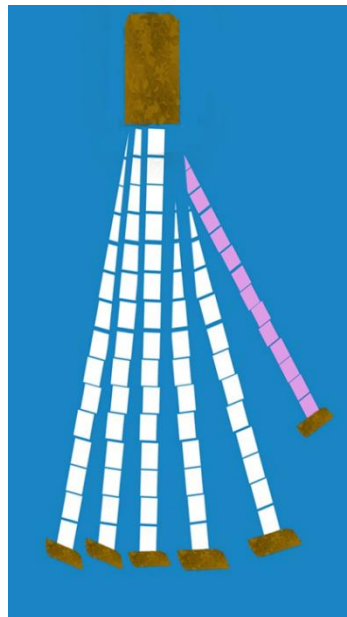


THE COUNCIL "FIRE"

The Council Fire wampum is important for our Nation meetings. The Council Fire is five long white wampum strings along with one purple wampum string connected to a piece of leather.

Each of the white strings represent the 5 original nations which are the Mohawks, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The single purple string represents the Tuscarora.

When the Council Fire wampum is on the bench, the meeting is considered officially open. The Peacemaker told us that our "Fire" wampum is only to be displayed during the daylight. Therefore, all Nation meetings must end before sunset.



HIAWATHA BELT

The Hiawatha Belt is a national belt of the Haudenosaunee. The belt is named after Hiawatha, the Peacemaker's helper. In this belt, it records when five nations united as one in peace. Each square represents a nation. The first square represents the eastern most nation, the Mohawk. The connecting symbols are the Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and the Seneca our western most nation. The center symbol represents Onondaga. Here at Onondaga, the Peacemaker planted the Tree of Peace where 50 Haudenosaunee leaders buried their weapons of anger, hatred, and war beneath it.

Onondaga are the Firekeepers where the Haudenosaunee will meet to discuss a path for the betterment of the people. The Eastern doorkeepers (Mohawks) and the Western doorkeepers (Senecas) sit together as Older Brothers. The Cayuga and Oneida sit together as Younger Brothers. All must work together to make decisions until we have become of One Mind.

The Hiawatha Belt is displayed at all Grand Council meetings.

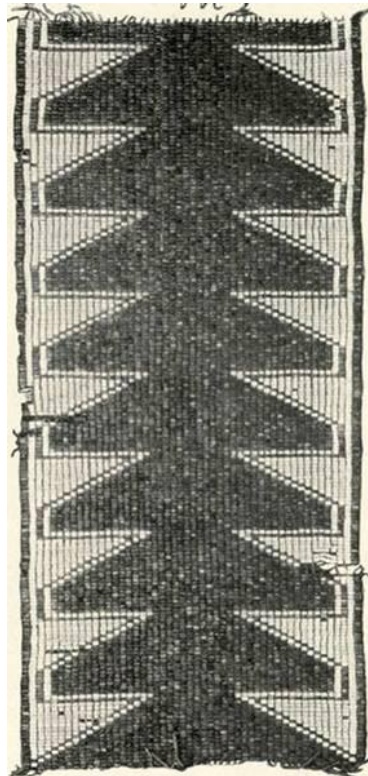


DUST FAN BELT

The Dust Fan is another belt created during the Haudenosaunee's beginnings. The Dust Fan belt symbolizes the Tree of Peace and is used to guide chiefs to continue the Great Law. The Great Law includes the roles and responsibilities of the Chiefs, Clan Mothers, Faithkeepers, and the people. The tree on the belt is everlasting as it continues beyond the end of the belt foretelling the strength and longevity of the union.

The belt also has other significance. This belt is used to symbolize the chief's need for "clear" vision. The dust may sometimes cloud the vision of the chiefs. This belt wipes the dust from their eyes to see clearly the best decision for the people.

The Dust Fan Belt is displayed at all Grand Council meetings.

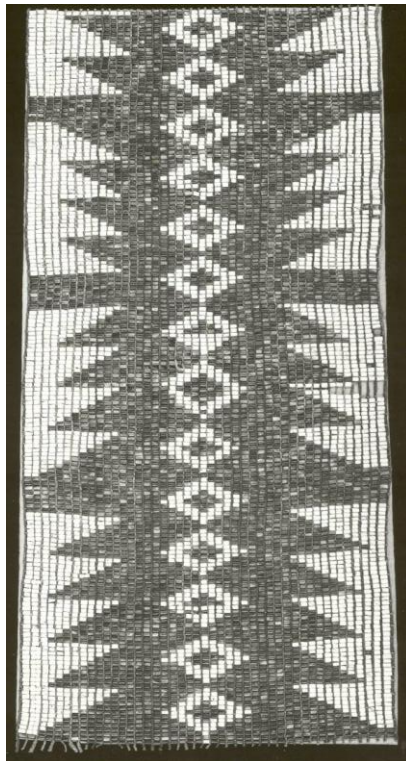


TADODAHO BELT

The Tadodaho Belt is another belt created at the Haudenosaunee's beginnings. The Tadodaho belt recalls the time when the Peacemaker combed the snakes from Tadodaho's hair. Changing the evil-minded Tadodaho into a pure-thinking leader.

The Tadodaho Belt also reminds the Haudenosaunee that once all of the chiefs accepted the Great Law, they became the guardians of this great peace for all of the generations to come. The Tadodaho Belt shows the Great Tree of Peace. In the center of the Great Tree of Peace there are 14 diamonds in the center of the belt. These diamonds represent the thirteen chiefs that are sitting with Tadodaho at Onondaga to continue the ways of the Haudenosaunee.

The Tadodaho Belt is displayed at all Grand Council meetings.

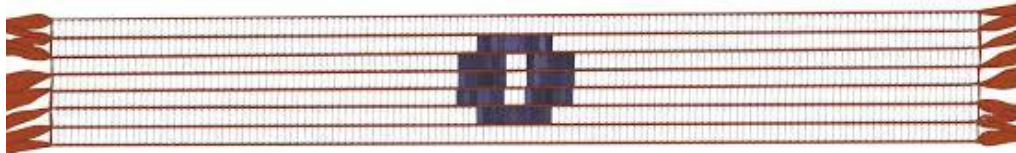


ONE BOWL ONE SPOON

The One Dish One Spoon Belt refers to the teachings of the Peacemaker in the creation of the Haudenosaunee. When he came to the lands of the five nations, people were fighting and destroying each other. Once the people united, the Peacemaker issued these guidelines that we should follow to keep the peace among us.

The Peacemaker said that we should now eat together. When we eat, there will be no sharp objects there to cause any bloodshed. Also, when you eat, there will only be one dish and one spoon for everyone to share.

The people now knew from the Peacemaker's instructions how to live. The Creator has given us the gifts we need to be happy. We are to no longer fight each other over these gifts anymore but to share everything between us. The One Dish One Bowl wampum is a white wampum belt with a single purple bowl in the middle.

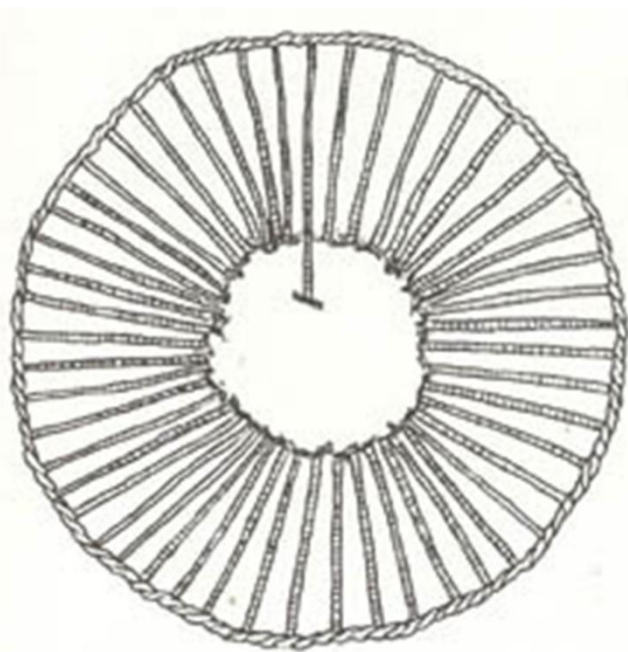


CIRCLE WAMPUM

The Circle Wampum is a very important belt for the Haudenosaunee. The equal strands of white wampum strings represent the 50 chiefs of the Haudenosaunee. Each chief being equal and united. When we are born our heart is in the middle of the circle. As we grow, the chiefs and the people work to keep the circle strong.

The chiefs are to be linking arms creating a large circle. Inside of the circle are the ways of the Haudenosaunee. The language, ceremonies, culture, and the way of life of our people. The people inside of this circle follow the ways set down from the Creator. It is the responsibility of the chiefs to protect and continue the ways of the Haudenosaunee.

If a person does not follow the ways of the Creator and the Haudenosaunee, they are said to have "left the circle" and are no longer under the protection of the 50 chiefs.



TWO ROW WAMPUM - Gaswéñdah

Gaswéñdah or the Two Row Wampum is our first treaty with the Europeans. In the early 1600s, the Dutch sailed up the river from the ocean to the land of the Mohawks. There the Mohawks noticed that these people wanted to stay in our lands. Haudenosaunee decided that if these new people would agree to live by our peaceful ways, they could stay.

One of the first items to be decided is what to call each other. The Dutch thought they should be called "Father" and the Haudenosaunee as "Son". The Haudenosaunee disagreed. We said that we should be equals. Therefore, we will call each other "Brothers". The Dutch agreed.

The 1613 agreement is based on how the Haudenosaunee first encountered the Dutch, on the river. In one row is a ship with our White Brothers' ways; in the other row is a canoe with our ways. Each will travel down the river of life side by side. Neither will attempt to steer the other's vessel. Meaning that neither will try to change each other and to be respectful of our different ways.

The Haudenosaunee and the Dutch agreed on three principles to make this treaty last. The first was friendship. The second principle is peace. The final principle is forever. Forever will be as long as the grass grows green, water flows downhill, and the sun rises in the east and sets in the west.

The Haudenosaunee continue to use this treaty as a way to meet with our White Brothers.

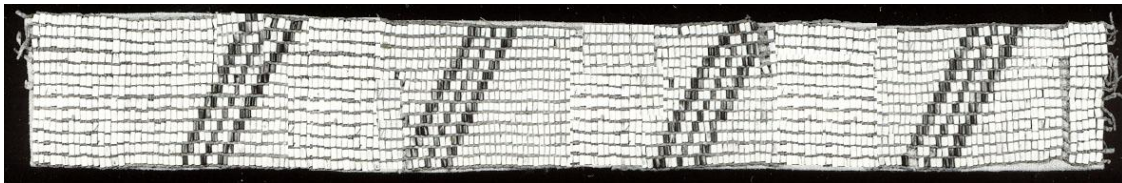


PALE FACE BELT

The Pale Face belt recounts the time when the white settlers first entered our lands. When the settlers first came, they needed help farming, hunting, fishing, gathering medicines, and help in their overall survival.

The Haudenosaunee then reached out to help the people. We knew that they needed help to survive in our lands. We taught them about farming and sharing our seeds that grew best in our area. The Europeans were introduced to foods such as our Three Sisters and how to grow them which helped them to survive.

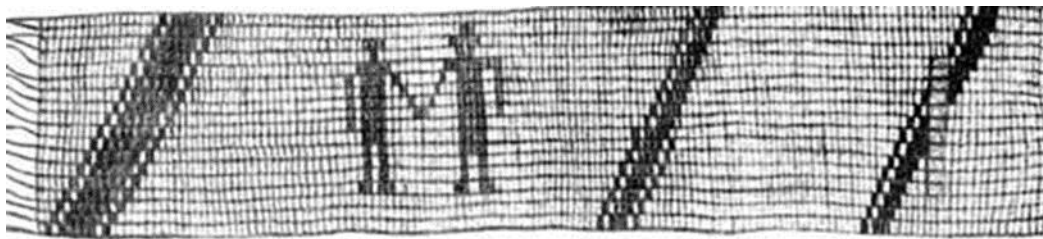
The Pale Face belt is a white belt. On this belt is a series of three diagonal lines. The middle line represents the white settlers and the two lines represent the Haudenosaunee who are there to support them.



PENN BELT

The Haudenosaunee are caretakers of the lands from the Hudson River to the Mississippi River. When the Quakers, led by William Penn, were looking to set up a settlement for their people, they asked the Haudenosaunee for lands. The Haudenosaunee agreed to have the Quakers live below the Susquehanna River. This land is now known as the state of Pennsylvania.

The Quakers knew that in order for this agreement to be valid, a belt was made. The belt is a white belt with two people in the center, a Quaker and a Haudenosaunee. This belt made the agreement official.

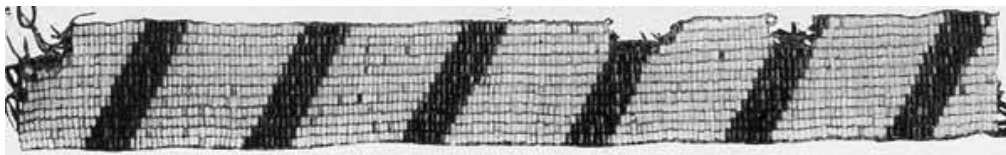


SIX NATIONS BELT

The Six Nations belt records the time when the Tuscarora joined the Haudenosaunee. In 1712, the Tuscarora lived in the south in an area now called North Carolina. The white settlers arriving there were attacking and driving the Tuscarora out of their homes.

The Tuscarora reached out to the Haudenosaunee to see if their people could come and live under the protection of the Great Tree of Peace. The Haudenosaunee agreed. The Peacemaker informed us that other nations can join and when they do, we will expand by adding rafters to the Haudenosaunee, the People of the Longhouse. The Tuscarora then walked north to live in the Haudenosaunee lands and became the sixth nation of the Great Peace.

The Six Nations belt is a white belt with six dark rafters representing the addition of the Tuscarora to the five nations.

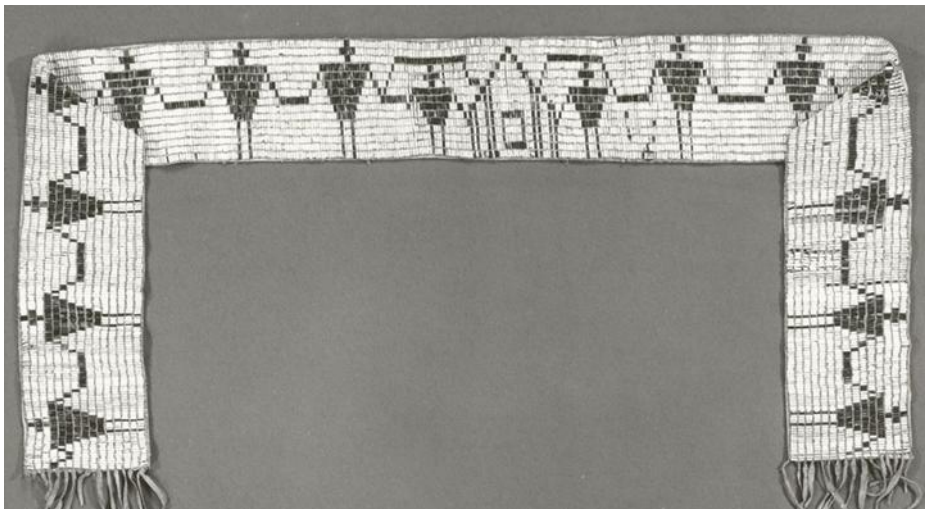


GEORGE WASHINGTON BELT

The George Washington belt records a peace between the United States and the Haudenosaunee at the Canandaigua Treaty in 1794. This treaty recognized the United States and Haudenosaunee as separate nations, established a boundary line, payment of Haudenosaunee lands, a way to settle disputes, and a pledge of peace between the two nations. This is an important treaty as it was one of the first acts of diplomacy the new country, the United States, enacted to keep peace.

The George Washington belt is a six-foot white belt. The middle of this belt shows a Longhouse with the President and Tadodaho on either side of the Longhouse. Joining Tadodaho, the President, and the Longhouse are 13 large figures also holding hands. These figures represent the 13 original states of the United States at that time.

This is an important belt as it represents the Canandaigua Treaty and the sovereignty of the Haudenosaunee. The Haudenosaunee often point to this belt as showing that the treaty is still alive. To this day, the United States still send cloth to the Nations to acknowledge that this treaty is still valid.



NEW YORK STATE

New York State recognized the importance of the wampum belts. The state also knew that the Onondaga are the wampum keeper of the Haudenosaunee. State officials began coming to Onondaga leaders and believed that the belts were too valuable for them to be in the Onondaga's possession. The State said the belts belonged in a safe place, like a museum.

New York State officials began to try to convince the Onondagas to give the belts to them. When that didn't work, the State began to threaten the Onondagas if the belts were not handed over, they would go to jail.

Then in 1890, New York State illegally bought the belts from an individual. The council said that no person had no right selling the belts that belonged to the nation. The State disagreed and kept the wampum belts.

For over 90 years the Onondaga tried and tried to get the belts back from the State Museum. For many years, the council sent many leaders to New York to say that the belts belonged back in Onondaga. New York State refused to return the belts and they remained in Albany.

Finally, in 1989, Chief Irving Powless Jr negotiated the return of the belts to Onondaga! On October 29, New York State loaded up the belts in a van in Albany surrounded by State Troopers and traveled to Onondaga to return the belts. It was very emotional seeing the belts again after being away from the longhouse for so long. Many people came from all over the other nations to see this event. Many speeches were made, round dances were song, a Tree of Peace was planted, photos were taken and we had a great feast.



OTGOÄ'.

Otgoä' symbolism can be seen today across all of the Haudenosaunee territory. People love to use the color purple and white in their outfits for longhouse or just to wear around the town. Wampum designs are incorporated into flags, jewelry, shirts, shorts, jerseys, beadwork, and even bridges! The Haudenosaunee will continue to value Otgoä' just like our elders did.

