

Introduction

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Circles of Interaction

This guest edited issue of Ontario Archaeology, titled *Multidisciplinary Investigations into Huron-Wendat and St. Lawrence Iroquoian Connections*, brings together two ends of a circle. The circle is a contemporary expression of the way the Wendat used to do things in the past. In other words, it is a significant example of a contemporary chain of alliance.

For decades, the history and culture of the Huron-Wendats has been recorded, interpreted, and written by Euro-Canadian scholars and researchers who essentially built their reputations and credibility on the very rich heritage of this First Nation. These scholars typically observed distinctive attributes of the material culture in the St. Lawrence Valley in the sixteenth century. They thus considered the “St. Lawrence Iroquoians” as a distinctive ethnic group that differed from the ancestral Wendats. Archaeologists refer to the people encountered in A.D. 1535 by Jacques Cartier as St. Lawrence Iroquoians. They were thought to have “disappeared” by A.D. 1608 when Champlain arrived in the region. Archaeologists have long tried to explain this disappearance as a result of the introduction of European diseases, warfare, and environmental changes that impacted agricultural yields. Where the St. Lawrence Iroquoians went, therefore, became a mystery to be solved, and is an issue we will discuss in detail in a later section.

It is with this picture in mind that in 2015, the Huron-Wendats Nation (HWN) initiated a circle of interaction during the joint Ontario Archaeological Society (OAS) and Eastern States Archeological Federation (ESAF) symposium held in Midland, Ontario, Canada. The OAS and ESAF are societies that bring together professional

archaeologists and interested members of the general public to collectively promote archaeology in Ontario and in much of the eastern United States. At the symposium, the HWN hosted a day-long conference session investigating the relationship between the ancestral Wendats and the people known as the St. Lawrence Iroquoians. Several aspects of this symposium are notable: the location and timing of the conference, and the lead role of the HWN in the event.

The year 2015 marked the four-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Samuel de Champlain in present-day Simcoe County, Ontario. As a representative of the French Crown, Champlain forged alliances with aboriginal peoples, including members of the Huron-Wendat Confederacy. In the course of the 35 years following Champlain’s sojourn, the lives of the ancestral Wendats and the new European migrants were profoundly transformed.

It should come as no surprise, then, that mission sites in Simcoe County, the shared heritage of the Huron-Wendats and the French, have caught the imagination of archaeologists for generations. Yet, with very few exceptions, descendant communities have been left out of the knowledge creation about their ancestors. Members of descendant communities have limited opportunities to engage with scholars and heritage professionals when it comes to the interpretation of archaeology and the preservation of cultural heritage.

The joint OAS and ESAF symposium, which was titled “Circles of Interaction: The Wendats and Their Neighbours in the time of Champlain,” therefore sought to be a positive step toward changing this problematic practice in Canadian archaeology. First, HWN took a lead role in

organizing the conference and in hosting a full-day session. In consultation with professional archaeologists, the HWN selected the topics to be addressed and the scholars presenting them. Themes of particular interest were archaeological, linguistic, and historical (oral and text) sources on the relationship between the ancestral Wendats and the St. Lawrence Iroquoians. These interests reflect the focus of the present volume.

Second, the conference organizers recognized that Simcoe County poses a geographical and linguistic challenge for archaeology and heritage management. Most heritage professionals in the area are non-native Anglophones. While members of First Nations groups living in the region (Rama, Beausoleil) have advocated on behalf of all First Nations heritage, they generally are not direct Huron-Wendat descendants. Archaeologists often consider the ancestral Wendats a diasporic people who live in a number of places outside of Simcoe County, including Wendake (in the Canadian province of Quebec), the US states of Oklahoma and Kansas, and the US city of Detroit. To facilitate engagement between archaeologists and descendant communities, the conference organizers invited members of the community in Wendake to travel to Midland, a nearly 1000 km journey.

Furthermore, selected sessions in English during the three-day symposium were simultaneously translated in French, ensuring that French-speaking Huron-Wendat delegates could fully participate in the event. Summaries of conference presentations were placed on the official conference website (www.wendatcircles.org) for broader accessibility for all Huron-Wendats as well as for the general public. Finally, given the interest of the Huron-Wendats in Wendake, the session proceedings presented in this volume have been produced in an accessible format and language appropriate for a general audience.

These short examples underscore the essence of working together, collaboratively, at the same level. While the Huron-Wendats support archaeological work and other scientific research on chosen cultural sites, they first need to be sure that the findings will help to better understand the lives and times of their ancestors. The essence of

such collaborative research represents an opportunity for a First Nation, like the Huron-Wendat, that is open, curious, modern, and willing to learn more about the past. It also represents for members of descendant communities with an occasion to be part of scholarly research and to more fully collaborate with scientists toward mutually beneficial goals. Therefore, in moving beyond simply being cited in acknowledgments of published articles, we take a significant step toward changing problematic practices in Canadian archaeology.

From the Huron-Wendat perspective, such collaboration is a modern expression of the win-win situation of alliances back in the ancient times. For the Huron-Wendats, their ancestors may be proud to see archaeological work being done to try to understand their past world. They are probably even prouder to see that their descendants are part of these efforts. Finally, as a metaphor, it is a very good example of polishing all the links of the chain of alliance.

The Huron-Wendat Nation and St. Lawrence Iroquoians: Their Origins and Relations

We now return to the so-called “mystery” of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians. Up until recently, this question has captivated archaeologists working in Ontario, Quebec, and the eastern United States. Yet, the mystery has never been a big issue for the Huron-Wendats because they never considered the St. Lawrence Iroquoians as distinct from themselves; thus the latter’s apparent disappearance is not a curiosity. The St. Lawrence Iroquoians shared many common characteristics with the ancestral Wendats, notably, an Iroquoian language, permanent longhouses regrouped as villages with or without palisades, and the growing of maize. For the ancestral Wendats, these St. Lawrence Iroquoians were simply family members who were living in a remote area and who, by the conjuncture of European diseases, warfare, and environmental changes, decided to move to their closest family members for a better future.

The papers in this collection seek to shed light on this very issue, and in so doing, draw attention to how archaeologists make knowledge and maintain perceptions about the past. As a

whole, the Special Issue presents current knowledge and understanding of the origins of and relations between the ancestral Wendats and the St. Lawrence Iroquoians and simultaneously makes explicit both the concepts archaeologists employ and their interpretations. This publication reflects two aims: first, authors have made efforts to write for a general audience, so that non-specialist readers can readily understand these ideas, and, second, authors have positioned themselves within scholarly discussions reflecting current trends in archaeology. They range from critical discussions of ethnicity and its problematic correlation with archaeological material (Gaudreau and Lesage); to oral history (Richard) and linguistics (Steckley) as a source on the past; to geopolitics and political history (Birch); to the life and movement of people through time (Gates St-Pierre; Abel); to warfare (Engelbrecht and Jamieson); to novel techniques, such as social network analysis (Dermarkar, Birch, Shafie, Hart, and Williamson) and the tracing of social interaction and exchange over space (Williamson);

to the emergence of new identities (Ramsden). The final contribution, by Gary Warrick (who was a discussant in the session) and Louis Lesage, summarizes these interests and offers direction for future research.

Finally, we are aware that authors have used a range of terms and names (e.g., Huron, Wendat, Huron-Wendat). We have not attempted to standardize their use; rather, we have asked authors to carefully explain their usage in their respective papers.

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