

# Broken Chains of Custody: Possessing, Dispossessing, and Repossessing Lost Wampum Belts

MARGARET M. BRUCHAC

Assistant Professor of Anthropology  
Coordinator, Native American and Indigenous Studies  
University of Pennsylvania

## INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2009, two historical shell bead wampum belts<sup>1</sup>—identified as “early” and “rare” and valued at between \$15,000 and \$30,000 each—were advertised for sale at a Sotheby’s auction of American Indian art objects<sup>2</sup> belonging to the estate of Herbert G. Wellington.<sup>3</sup> One belt, identified as having been collected by Frank G. Speck from the Mohawk community in Oka (Kanesatake, Quebec) before 1929, was tagged with an old accession number from the Heye Foundation/Museum of the American Indian (MAI; MAI #16/3827). The second belt, collected by John Jay White from an unknown locale before 1926, was identified as Abenaki; it, too, was tagged with an old MAI number (MAI #11/123; Figure 1).

The Sotheby’s notice caught the attention of the Haudenosaunee Standing Committee on Burial Rules and Regulations (HSC), a consortium of Six Nations Iroquoian chiefs, tribal historians, and community leaders who serve as advocates and watchdogs for tribal territory and

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1 The generic term *wampum*, borrowed from the Algonquian word *wampumpeag* for “white shells” (Trumbull 1903, 340–41), refers to cylindrical marine shell beads used by the Indigenous peoples of northeastern North America. *Algonquian* is the broad linguistic classification for the Algonkian cultural group that includes the Indigenous nations in New England and in parts of Quebec, Ontario, and the Great Lakes. The beads were carved from the shells of univalve and bivalve mollusks harvested from the shores of Long Island Sound and other northeastern North American locales where riverine fresh waters mingled with marine salt waters.

2 The term *Indian* is used as it appears in historical documents; no pejorative is intended. In this paper, the terms *Indian*, *Native*, and *Indigenous* will be used to individually and collectively refer to the peoples also known as American Indians and Native Americans in the United States, and as Aborigines and First Nations in Canada.

3 Sotheby’s Auction House, 2009, Sale N08554: Notice of American Indian Art Including Property from the Collection of Frieda and Milton Rosenthal, and from the Collection of Herbert G. Wellington, New York, NY.

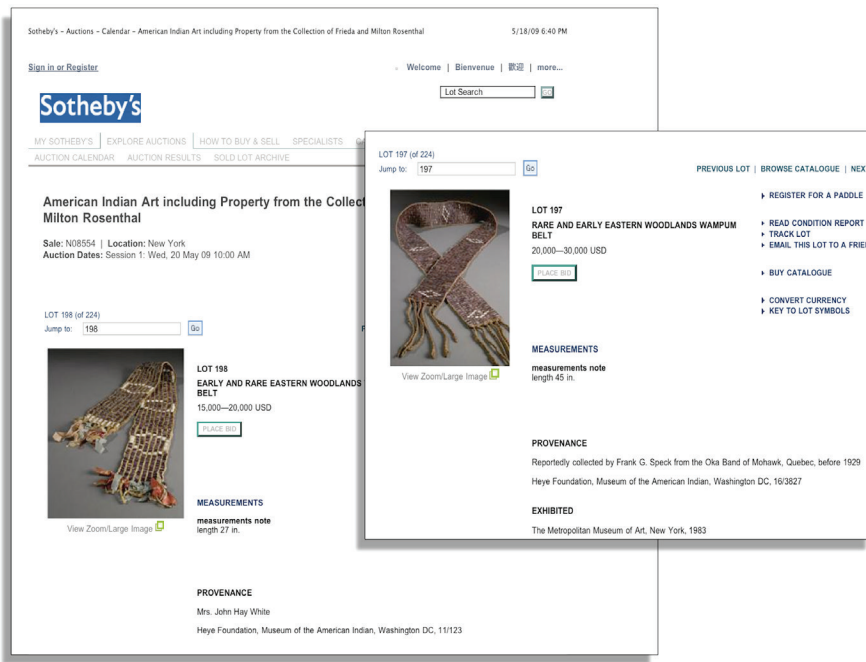


FIGURE 1. Sotheby's advertisements for the proposed auction of two wampum belts, May 2009. Screenshot composite photograph by Margaret M. Bruchac, 2009, with permission from Sotheby's.

cultural property interests. HSC members regularly monitor art and antiquities auctions, and report periodically to the Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which represents Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscarora Nations and bands in both the United States and Canada.<sup>4</sup> The HSC concluded, based on the provenance information provided by Sotheby's, that these objects were tribal property, and notified the auction house that formal repatriation claims would be forthcoming from both *Kanien:keha'ka* (Mohawk) and *Wôbanakiak* (Abenaki) people, via the Mohawk Nation of

4 The term *Haudenosaunee*, derived from the Seneca term *Hodé-no-sau-nee*, loosely translates to "People of the Longhouse," and collectively refers to the nations that constituted the historic Five Nations (before 1722) and Six Nations (after 1722) Iroquois Confederacy. This alliance is also known as the "Iroquois League" (Richter 1987, 186–88). Today, the Grand Council of the Confederacy maintains two central gathering places (historically referred to as "council fires") in New York and in Ontario, and also maintains contact with related tribal nations/bands in Quebec, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin.

Kanesatake and the Abenaki Nation of Odanak in Quebec, Canada.<sup>5</sup> In response, one day before the proposed sale, the Wellington heirs (Charles H., James F., and William B. Wellington) and Sotheby's representatives agreed to withdraw the belts from auction and engage in consultation with tribal claimants (Barron 2009).

The members of the HSC brought this issue to the attention of the news media both to solicit public support and alert art dealers that other patrimonial objects might have entered the art market (Maneker 2009). It should be noted that this was not Sotheby's first encounter with Haudenosaunee claimants. In 1972, Onondaga Chief Oren Lyons led a group of Haudenosaunee activists into an auction to protest the sale of Seneca wampum belts and ceremonial masks (*hadu:wi*, often mistakenly called "false faces"); in response, the auction was halted and the objects were withdrawn from sale (Montgomery 1972). When Sotheby's advertised another auction lot of Seneca masks 20 years later, in 1992, the Haudenosaunee were again prepared to protest, but Elizabeth Sackler, founder of the nonprofit American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation (AIRORF), intervened. She convinced the consigners to anonymously donate the masks to AIRORF, which then deposited them in the custody of the Tonawanda Seneca Nation (Sackler 1994). At that juncture, Sotheby's General Counsel and Senior Vice President Marjorie E. Stone, along with Vice President Ellen Napiura Taubman (who was then head of the American Indian art division), instituted new protocols to avoid future complaints. They assured Haudenosaunee leaders that henceforth they would "notify representatives when sensitive material is consigned for auction," and that "timely objections to sale will result in an item's removal from the auction" (Sackler 1995, 3).

With that assurance in mind, members of the HSC believed that the proposed auction of two wampum belts in 2009 without prior notice was simply an unfortunate oversight, and that negotiations to repatriate would be relatively straightforward. Yet, while sitting in on consultations with Sotheby's, I came to realize that the recovery of these objects might not be possible until all the involved parties—Sotheby's agents, the members of the HSC, tribal claimants, and the Wellington heirs—could reconcile their fundamentally different beliefs about the value of wampum, the logics of possession, and the inherent animacy and identifiability of the objects themselves.

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5 Letter from the Haudenosaunee Standing Committee on Burial Rules and Regulations to Jane Levine at Sotheby's, May 15, 2009. Copy in author's possession, used here with permission. Kanesatake, also spelled *Kanehsata'ke*, is the traditional name of the Oka Mohawk community.

## MATERIAL MATTERS

David Roche, Sotheby's American Indian art expert, had identified both wampum belts as dating to the colonial era, and noted that the Wellington family had not made any repairs or alterations to these objects during their term of ownership. Even so, the members of the HSC felt it necessary to confirm that these were authentic historical objects and not modern replicas or artistic fakes. By examining high-resolution photographs, we were able to determine that both belts superficially matched the stylistic appearance and construction techniques of other known shell bead wampum belts made during the 17th and 18th centuries in northeastern North America (see, for example, photographs in Beauchamp 1901 and Speck 1916). More details were observable upon close examination of these belts in person.

Each belt had been hand-woven in a square-weave pattern, with warp strands of what appeared to be brain-tanned deerskin leather and weft strands of twisted vegetal fibers. These fibers visually resembled the cordage used during the 17th century in both Algonkian and Haudenosaunee wampum belts, identified as primarily derived from dogbane/black Indian hemp (*Apocynum cannabinum*), swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), or hairy milkweed/white Indian hemp (*Asclepias pulchra*) (e.g., Speck 1925, 18). The cylindrical shell beads in each belt were consistent with surviving examples of historical wampum belts in multiple museum collections.<sup>6</sup> White beads were typically carved from the central columns of marine whelk shells (either *Busycon canaliculatum* or *Busycon carica*), and purple beads from the hinges of quahog shells (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) (Beauchamp 1901); the vast majority of these shells were harvested from the coastal waters along present-day Long Island Sound (Brooks 2008; Ceci 1982). These beads measured, on average, one-quarter inch in length and one-eighth inch in diameter, and the roughly uniform diameter of the channels in each bead suggested that most had been drilled by metal, rather than stone, bits.<sup>7</sup> With these observations in hand, and after comparison to

6 As an extension of my provenance research for the HSC, I began surveying and conducting close visual analysis of historical wampum belts. I have compiled a photographic reference file of (thus far) more than 200 wampum belts identified as dating from (or having been collected during) the 1600s through the late 1800s, in addition to many beads, strings, and collars in the collections of multiple museums and tribal nations. See Bruchac (2017).

7 Before European contact, the holes in both discoid and cylindrical wampum beads were bored with pump drills or bow drills using a stone bit. High-speed rotation and pressure enabled artisans to puncture the shell without shattering, and shells were either bored when fresh or soaked in water to keep the heat and dust in check (Bruchac 2015). By the 1600s, as is evidenced in materials collected from known wampum manufacturing sites like Fort Shantok, Native artisans utilized repurposed iron nails or awls as drill bits (Bruchac 2014). This adaptation sped up the boring process and facilitated the mass production of larger





FIGURE 2. Abenaki wampum belt collected by John Jay White from unknown location before 1925. Heye Foundation/Museum of the American Indian accession #11/123. Courtesy of the Haudenosaunee Standing Committee on Burial Rules and Regulations.

more than 100 other examples of wampum belts from the same general era and locale, I could confidently state that both of the wampum belts at Sotheby's were consistent with belts known to have been made and/or used by northeastern Indigenous peoples during the 1600s to 1700s.

Despite the apparent similarities in material and construction, the two belts differ dramatically in design and condition. The Abenaki belt collected by John Jay White measures eight rows wide and 204 rows (27 inches) long, and contains approximately 1,600 shell beads (Figure 2). Four open white hexagonal symbols appear on a dark field. Hexagonal symbols were widely used by both Algonkian and Haudenosaunee peoples during the 18th century to indicate tribal locations, forts, or gathering places where allies could share resources, by conceptually and literally eating out of the “dish with one spoon.”<sup>8</sup> This belt may

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quantities of wampum beads (Beauchamp 1901; Ceci 1982). Some of the historic wampum belts produced or commissioned by settler colonial leaders include beads carved from giant conch shells (*Stigas strombus*) imported from the West Indies (Bruchac 2017).

8 The “dish with one spoon” concept signified a shared geographical territory and political alliance among multiple Native nations (Brooks 2008, 124). A dish belt once held by Wampum Keeper John Skanawati Buck at Grand River, Ontario, has a single flattened hexagonal symbol in the center, signifying that the Algonquin nations (the Algonkian peoples indigenous to Ontario) and their Haudenosaunee neighbors and allies “were to be as relatives who are so nearly akin that they eat from the same dish” (Hale 1883, 91). Another historic dish

have marked such an alliance, visually and materially. The shell beads are not uniform; they vary so much in shape, size, and condition that they appear to have been assembled together from multiple sources, perhaps even repurposed from earlier wampum belts taken apart to create this one.<sup>9</sup> The leather warp strands are uneven and, in some areas, nearly folded in half, suggesting that the warp also may have been repurposed. The belt shows signs of very rough handling, dirt, grease, breakage, and multiple repairs with cotton thread. One end of the belt is now incomplete and shows signs of having been mostly re-woven; both ends are ragged and tied off with bits of ribbon, perhaps to prevent further breakage. The asymmetry of the design seems to indicate that the original belt was once longer, with more than four hexagonal symbols. The overall condition of this belt is typical of objects that endured a great deal of travel and handling over time. Based upon its construction and condition, it could be inferred that this belt was not curated in a single locale; it was apparently handled by many people and carried to multiple locales (likely during rituals of intertribal diplomacy) before it entered into a non-Native collection.

By comparison with the Abenaki belt, the Mohawk wampum belt collected by Frank G. Speck is in nearly pristine condition (Figure 3). It measures nine rows wide and 270 rows (45 inches) long, and contains approximately 2,400 beads. Five open white diamond symbols appear on a dark field. In general, a field of dark beads represents a complex, difficult, potentially dangerous territory or circumstances, and white beads represent places of clarity and peace (Hewitt 1907; Hill 2001). Open white diamond symbols were often used by the Haudenosaunee to signify related and allied tribal villages, nations, or council fires located within a larger territory (e.g., Beauchamp 1901, 398). The beads in this belt are remarkably uniform in color and shape, and the purple beads are very dense and dark; this depth of color is only possible when the beads are made from the shells of mature quahog.<sup>10</sup> The artisans who originally made these beads must have worked from a very old and healthy shellfish bed. The artisans who subsequently wove this belt must have had access to a large collection of beads to select from to gain such uniformity. The warp and weft are very tight

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belt, called the "Sir William Johnson dish belt," was made with four symmetrical hexagons, signifying four locations where allies could procure provisions (Beauchamp 1901, 428).

9 The assemblage of beads in this belt includes one blue glass bead and three white glass beads that date to the early 1700s.

10 The depth of color in the hinge area of the quahog shell is determined by the age of the mollusk. Quahogs along the eastern coast of North America reach maturity at approximately 30 years of age, and continue to grow slowly for ages ranging upward of 200 years, building thicker shells and darker hinges through new deposits of calcium carbonate each year (Rice 1992).



FIGURE 3. Mohawk wampum belt collected by Frank G. Speck from Kanesatake, Quebec in 1913. Heye Foundation/Museum of the American Indian accession #16/3287. Courtesy of the Haudenosaunee Standing Committee on Burial Rules and Regulations.

and sound, and only a few beads are missing; there is no sign of rough handling, no indication of repairs, and no evidence of repurposing or reconstruction. The overall condition of this belt is typical of objects that were both well-made and lightly handled. From the condition alone, it can be inferred that this belt was likely in the custody of only a few wampum keepers, and that it was curated in only a few locales; it does not show signs of having been handled by or circulated among multiple parties before it entered into a non-Native collection.

#### POLITICAL MATTERS

Throughout the spring and summer of 2009, the members of the HSC, in tandem with their legal and historical consultants, collected documentation and oral testimony from the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi–St. Francis/Sokoki Band, the Abenaki Nation of Odanak, the Mohawk Nation of Kanesatake, the Onondaga Nation, and the Tadodaho of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, among others. Tribal attorneys—including General Counsel for the Onondaga Nation Joseph J. Heath and Legal Counsel Shannon Keller O’Loughlin—pleaded with the Wellingtons and Sotheby’s on legal and ethical grounds, noting that “removing sacred items and objects of cultural patrimony from Indigenous contexts and turning them into marketable ‘art’ goods only

supports the eradication of culture.”<sup>11</sup> Several support letters referenced the understanding encoded in the United States Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 that wampum belts of the Haudenosaunee, in particular, are considered to be iconic examples of “items of cultural patrimony.”<sup>12</sup>

James Anaya, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Indigenous issues at the time, weighed in, informing Sotheby’s that “the international community both recognizes and protects the rights of indigenous peoples to historically, culturally, and spiritually significant pieces of cultural patrimony, such as the Wampum Belts at issue here.”<sup>13</sup> Anaya referenced Article 11, Section 1 of the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations 2007), which asserts Indigenous ownership of past, present, and future cultural traditions and objects. Tonya Gonnella Frichner (Onondaga), a member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, pointed out the international implications, since the Mohawk belt was identified as belonging to a First Nation in Canada. International tribal patrimony “must be returned because of these international viewpoints that the nations have been working on for years. . . . Only a national identity can understand what these objects are as national cultural patrimony.”<sup>14</sup>

In August, Sotheby’s agents agreed to meet with a delegation of tribal leaders and consultants at the New York office, where the two wampum belts were laid out for viewing, and words were spoken over them.<sup>15</sup> One of the Kanien:keha’ka delegates, Charlie Patton, spoke in his Native language, and then loosely translated his words as follows:

We speak to the belts, to say we have not forgotten them. We give them thanks and greetings. We do not know what road they have traveled, but we thank them for showing themselves to us again. . . . On behalf of the Clan Mothers, I thanked the belts for coming through to us because they had been lost. . . . On behalf of the men and women of all our Nations, we are grateful that the belts have

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11 Letter from Shannon Keller O’Loughlin to Jane Levine at Sotheby’s, September 8, 2009. Copy in author’s possession, used here with permission.

12 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, 25 U.S.C. § 3001(3)(D), and 43 C.F.R. § 10.2 (d)(4).

13 Letter from James Anaya to Maarten Ten Holden at Sotheby’s, September 7, 2009. Copy in author’s possession, used here with permission.

14 Tonya Gonnella Frichner, from author’s notes taken during the consultation with HSC representatives at Sotheby’s on August 17, 2009.

15 Attendees at this consultation included: Onondaga Chiefs Sid Hill and Oren Lyons; Mohawk Chiefs Curtis Nelson and Charlie Patton; Tonawanda Seneca representatives Stuart Jamieson, Janine Huff, and LuAnn Jamieson; Abenaki artisans Roger Sheehan, Vera Sheehan, and Jim Taylor; and lawyers Joseph Heath and Shannon Keller O’Loughlin, among others.

come back to us. The men and women who made these beads, who strung these belts together, they were thinking of us. . . . We give thanks to the Belts for showing themselves to us, so that our children will know Wampum. Speaking to the Belts, I told them, "You have been locked away too long and have spent too much time in darkness. . . . You have great life and spirit and power and it is time for you to use your energy to move. You have to convince the people around you, who hold you, to let you be free. . . . Clear their eyes, their minds, their throats and ears, and lift the heavy spot that is on their hearts, so they understand that your value is not in money, it is in the spirit that you carry."

The most compelling statement came from Condoled Chief Tehanakarine (Curtis Nelson) of Kanesatake. He had shared photographs of the two wampum belts with a highly regarded keeper of oral tradition, 94-year-old Turtle Clan Chief Tekarihoken (Samson Gabriel). Tekarihoken saw nothing familiar in the Abenaki wampum belt, but he immediately recognized the pattern and construction of the Mohawk wampum belt, which had not been seen by anyone in his community for many years. He related that this belt had been sent to the Mohawk band living at Kanesatake by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy chiefs during the late 1600s:

Tekarihoken stated that he knows about this Belt and what it was created for; he said that this Belt was given to Kanesatake by the then Five Nations Haudenosaunee as a political, cultural and spiritual commitment to continue a lasting relationship and lasting peace. He called this Belt a Commitment or Alliance belt. He added that this Belt also obligated the Confederacy and Kanesatake to provide mutual aid and support in times of trouble or difficulties. The Belt also recognized Kanesatake as the northernmost reach of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and a significant trading place. As the Belt shows five diamond symbols representing the Five Nations, this corroborates Tekarihoken's understanding that the Belt was given by the Five Nations Confederacy.<sup>16</sup>

Tekarihoken further testified that there had also been a companion belt, composed of a dark field with six diamonds, sent to Kanesatake in the late 1720s to represent the continued relationship with what was then the Six Nations Haudenosaunee (after the Tuscarora had been added as an allied nation). That belt, too, had been missing for many years. This testimony corresponded with documentation elsewhere that traced continuing political relations among Mohawk communities in

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16 Curtis Nelson (Tehanakarine), September 8, 2009, Declaration to the Haudenosaunee Standing Committee concerning Mohawk Wampum Belt at Sotheby's. Copy in author's possession, used here with permission.

Canada and Haudenosaunee communities in the United States, despite the apparent geographic and religious distances among them.<sup>17</sup>

Chief Nelson explained the losses of these Kanesatake wampum belts as follows. These two belts, in company with several others, remained in the custody of a Kanesatake chief and wampum keeper until his death around 1910. The chief's wife, while "dealing with grief and charged with certain customary protocols for the selection of a new chief," placed the tribal wampum in the custody of one of her relatives until a new wampum keeper could be chosen. Her trust was misplaced, since the belts were subsequently passed on (likely sold) to an antiquities dealer who left Kanesatake and took the wampum belts with him. Nelson identified the culprit by name as "a French man named J.B. Delay who was married to a Kanesatake woman." The chiefs "tried to get all the stolen Kanesatake Belts returned but were not successful at that time."<sup>18</sup>

Sotheby's executives, art experts, and legal team agreed to review all the material provided by the HSC before making a determination about the ownership and appropriate disposition of the two wampum belts. After that review, Jane E. Levine, Sotheby's Worldwide Director of Compliance and Senior Vice President, and David Roche stated that, in their expert opinion, these wampum belts were the indisputable legal property of the Wellington estate. As a conciliatory measure, they offered to broker a private sale to the HSC for a flat fee of \$60,000 for both belts. The members of the HSC were stunned. Levine and Roche insisted that patrimonial identification was impossible and asserted, as "common knowledge," their belief that most wampum belts are inherently unidentifiable.<sup>19</sup> They cited Douglas Ewing's assessment of these two specific wampum belts in his 1982 catalog of American Indian art: "Because wampum belts were used to send messages from one tribe to another, it is all but impossible to make specific tribal affiliations" (Ewing 1982, 87).

The Mohawk, Abenaki, and HSC representatives were keen to reclaim these belts, but reluctant to agree to purchase objects

17 Mohawk families at Kanesatake traced their ancient relations in several directions, from the Mohawk Valley of present-day New York State to the "St. Lawrence Iroquoians" at Stadacona (Quebec City), and to the territory formerly known as Hochelaga (Montreal) (Swain 2010). Kanesatake also participated in an 18th-century alliance of First Nations Catholic converts, called the *Tsiatak Nihononwentsiake* or Seven Nations Confederacy, that linked Akwesasne, Kahnawake, Kanesatake, Odanak, Oswegatchie, Wendake, and Wolinak (Beaulieu and Sawaya 2000; Blanchard 1983).

18 Curtis Nelson (Tehanakarine), September 8, 2009, Declaration to the Haudenosaunee Standing Committee concerning Mohawk Wampum Belt at Sotheby's. Copy in author's possession, used here with permission.

19 From author's notes taken during the consultation with HSC representatives at Sotheby's on August 17, 2009.

improperly removed (if not stolen) from tribal custody. The exchange of money might constitute a tacit acceptance of the concept that patrimonial objects could be rightfully alienated and sold. Payments to any one private collector might encourage other collectors to continue trafficking in cultural patrimony. A long impasse ensued, during which time the Wellington brothers held firm to their asking price, and Sotheby's agreed to hold the wampum belts in secure storage while awaiting an answer.

At the behest of the HSC (despite the skepticism of Sotheby's experts), I initiated more comprehensive research into the object histories of these wampum belts. Beyond merely seeking to recover provenance data, I tried to untangle the apparent confusion about wampum ownership, in general. Taking a cue from the decolonizing methods of Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), I set forth to critically examine the underlying ideologies, assumptions, and value systems that had shaped anthropological research on Indigenous peoples in general, and wampum in particular. Was it true, as Ewing suggested, that the widespread circulation of wampum in colonial contexts had erased all evidence of tribal affiliations? Was the tradition of wampum ceremonialism still vital in the postcolonial era (as my Haudenosaunee interlocutors testified), or had the knowledges of wampum keepers been lost to memory (as some scholars insisted)? How did private collectors, museums, art dealers, and tribal nations come to hold such different (and seemingly incompatible) views about wampum?

Tuscarora scholar Richard W. Hill Sr. and the HSC granted me full access to their wampum archives, and I dove into various anthropological and museum archives to track the collectors themselves. What I found was surprisingly dense evidence that, around the turn of the 20th century, antiquarian collectors (e.g., Harriet Maxwell Converse, Frank Speck, George Gustav Heye) had colluded in ethically questionable purchases, removals, and relocations of wampum belts for museum collections. They had purchased wampum and other objects known to have been improperly removed from tribal custody, concealed data from tribal claimants, and secured many of these objects in museums for safekeeping (Bruchac 2018). But museums were not safe repositories. I discovered evidence that the two wampum belts in the Wellington collection had, three decades earlier, been among the thousands of high-value Native American objects surreptitiously removed from the collections of the Museum of the American Indian for sale to the private art market.

Through this research, it became clear that wampum belts, along with other sacred and patrimonial objects, had been subjected to shifts in meaning that assigned compellingly different identifications and



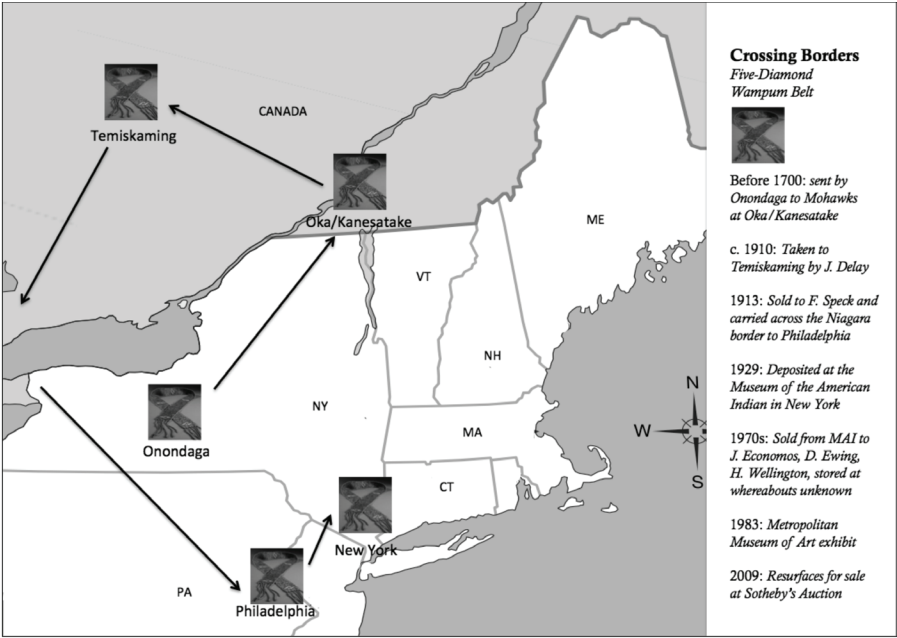


FIGURE 4. Map illustrating the movements of the five-diamond Kanesatake wampum belt over time, as it was trafficked across borders, into museums, and into private collections. Art by Margaret M. Bruchac, 2018.

values to the same objects. To trace where and how these shifts occurred, I began to construct what I call “object cartographies” (Figure 4). By methodically investigating each step of its life history as an object passes through the hands of various collectors, one can develop literal and conceptual maps that could be followed forward or backward in time, and across borders in space, to trace an object’s travels. In that way, I hoped to discover precisely which links in the chain of custody had been broken, and thereby discern how they might best be repaired.

THE SEMIOTICS OF WAMPUM CIRCULATION AND ALIENATION

Wampum ceremonialism is “a most valuable and extraordinary medium of communication” imbued with “economic, social, political, and ideational complexity” (Ceci 1982, 99). Historically, wampum beads, strings, and belts were regarded as valuable items of trade, potent substances in mythical reality, and ritual agents for promoting social and political cohesion and continuity (Hale 1895; Hamell 1992; Hewitt 1907). As personal adornment, wampum beads and strands

were worn by Native people dangling from the ears, in their hair, and as collars and bracelets around their necks and arms (Beauchamp 1901). Political “strings” of wampum in varying lengths and patterns were used as credentials, messages, invitations, and markers of the stages in condolence rituals (Beauchamp 1901, 344). During the early North American settler colonial era (1600s–1700s), wampum was also commonly woven into belts to serve as material records of alliances, political gifts among and between allies, and ritual tools of internal governance (Beauchamp 1901; Hale 1883). The word “belts” is somewhat misleading, since these objects were not intended as personal garments; even if draped around the shoulders or across the body of a speaker, they primarily functioned as political signals of intertribal and intercultural understandings. Wampum ceremonialism was such an effective method of communicating and transacting intercultural relations that it was enthusiastically adopted by colonial settler nations in negotiating with Native nations (Fenton 1998; White 1991).

Jesuit Father Joseph-François Lafitau (one of the earliest colonial settler observers of Indigenous wampum ceremonialism) noted that wampum belts were used by Haudenosaunee, Huron, and other Native nations to serve, in part, as mnemonic devices. Knowledgeable elders and wampum keepers preserved “the memory of historical events” and maintained “a local record by the words which they give these belts, each of which stands for a particular affair” (Lafitau [1724] 1974, 211). During diplomatic rituals, wampum belts were expected to recall (and not just represent) the messages (if not the literal words) spoken into them (Bohaker, Corbiere, and Phillips 2015; Hill 2001). The concept of textual preservation in wampum was embraced by Native and non-Native allies alike. For example, the 19th century Odawa (Ottawa) Chief Assiginack recalled the words spoken into their wampum belts by British colonial agent Sir William Johnson, who had declared, “you see that wampum before me, the body of my words, in this the spirit of my words shall remain, it shall never be removed” (Bohaker, Corbiere, and Phillips 2015, 58).<sup>20</sup>

The semiotics of wampum rely upon binary signaling; meanings are encoded in patterns of white and dark purple shell beads that facilitate specific ideations. Tuscarora scholar J. N. B. Hewitt noted that “auspicious” white beads communicated smooth relations, “peace, health, welfare and prosperity”; “inauspicious” dark beads communicated complex relations and potential “hostility, sorrow, death, condolence and mourning” (Hewitt 1907, 907). William N. Beauchamp’s 1901 summary illustrates the widespread use of both pictographic

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20 Library Archives of Canada 1900–1915, Record Group 10, Vol. 613: 440–43.

figures (e.g., human figures, crosses, dogs) and abstract symbols (e.g., diamonds, hexagons, lines, rafters) to represent intertribal and intercultural relations and alliances (see examples in Beauchamp 1901). Belts might be constructed and dedicated to specific purposes, but belts could also be repurposed, dismantled, repaired, and reconstructed as needed (Beauchamp 1901; Hill 2001; Williams 1989). At the material level, specific artisanal and aesthetic traditions are obviously visible in the component parts (warp, weft, beads, edging, etc.) and patterning (Bruchac 2017).

Do wampum belts only convey the meanings that human handlers ascribe to them (e.g., Latour 1992), or do they have agency of their own? One might logically interpret wampum belts as iconic examples of “distributed personhood,” in that they hold meanings that can be socially constructed by one group of persons and socially communicated to other persons at a distance (e.g., Gell 1998; Haraway 2015). Yet, in both Algonkian and Haudenosaunee ontology, the category of “personhood” is not limited to humans alone; some natural substances, charms, and ritual objects are assumed to possess power and potential animacy (Blanchard 1983; Hallowell 1960).<sup>21</sup> From an Indigenous ontological perspective, wampum belts embody the literal weaving together of thoughts from living human beings and materials from living marine, floral, and faunal beings. Wampum belts are thus entangled in social (and not just material) relationships with the non-human persons (e.g., flora, fauna, and mollusks) who provide the raw materials. Yet, a wampum belt is more than just an inanimate assemblage. If an object is both imbued with meaning and embodied with memory, it can potentially recall and communicate its own history (Olsen 2010; Matthews 2016). Museum professionals who consult with Indigenous communities on sacred and patrimonial objects routinely report that wampum belts, masks, and similar sacred and ritual objects are seen by Indigenous claimants to be “ancestors,” “relatives,” “informants,” and otherwise living persons who, even if they are “sleeping” in the collections, are capable of being awakened in the presence of the appropriate thoughts, words, and relations (e.g., Bell 2017; Colwell 2017; Conaty 2015; Matthews 2016).

Wampum belts support several complementary ideations: conceptual beliefs embodied in material substances, diplomatic understandings woven into tangible form, and human relationships facilitated by

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21 Under some circumstances, this power may be similar to the power possessed and expressed by non-human persons (animals, spirits, ancestors, etc.). As Irving Hallowell (1960) notes among the Ojibwe, “not only animate properties but even ‘person’ attributes may be projected upon objects which to us [non-Indigenous anthropologists] clearly belong to a physical inanimate category” (25).

objects as ritual partners. The wampum belts used for internal governance were typically entrusted to the care of individual tribal “wampum keepers” (Hale 1883) but considered to be communal property and/or relatives belonging to “everyone within a given clan, nation, or the entire confederacy” (Sullivan 1992, 8). For example, the principal wampum belts of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which recorded the understandings of the *Gayanashagowa* (Great Law) that governed the original Five Nations, were entrusted to the care of Onondaga chiefs who were expected to preserve them in perpetuity (Hale 1883).<sup>22</sup> When tribal nations relocated, custody for wampum collections sometimes crossed national and state boundaries. In the aftermath of the American Revolution and the War of 1812, when the Haudenosaunee Confederacy’s member nations split to form new “council fires” on the Haldimand Tract at the Grand River Reserve in Ontario, some of the historic wampum belts went to Canada with them (Fenton 1971, 457). These relocations did not, as some have suggested, result in the complete loss of memory or fracturing of wampum traditions (e.g., Becker 2002; Fenton 1971). Contemporaneous oral traditions collected by Beauchamp (1901), Hale (1883), and others attest that Haudenosaunee leaders on both sides of the United States/Canadian border continued to utilize wampum among and between their nations and bands to recall and reinforce political relationships.

During the late 1800s, however, when Haudenosaunee wampum belts were identified by museums as valuable collectibles, they began to vanish from tribal custody under suspicious circumstances. One of the most famous losses occurred in 1892, when Chief Thomas Webster illegally sold four wampum belts to Albany Mayor John Boyd Thatcher. In response, the Onondaga Nation deposed Webster from his chieftainship and sued Thatcher in New State court (Barreiro 1990). At trial, however, the judge ruled for Thatcher, claiming that Webster was merely a collector of antiquities and that “the wampums had lost their original significance and had become relics and curiosities” (“Wins Wampum Belts” 1899).<sup>23</sup> To prevent further losses, Harriet Maxwell Converse, who served as an advocate and honorary chief for the Haudenosaunee, persuaded several Onondaga chiefs to appoint the State of New York as an official *Ho-sen-na-ge-tah* (wampum keeper)

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22 See Haudenosaunee Standing Committee on Burial Rules and Regulations, 2001, “Haudenosaunee Policy on the Wampum Keeper.” Wampum Files at the Deyohahá:ge Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Six Nations Polytechnic Institute, Ohsweken, Ontario, Canada. Copy in author’s possession, used here with permission.

23 *Onondaga Nation v. Thatcher*, 29 Misc. 428 (Sup. Ct. Onondaga Co. 1899), aff’d, 53 A.D. 561 (4th Dept. 1900), aff’d, 169 N.Y. 584 (1901).

(Fenton 1971; Sullivan 1992).<sup>24</sup> This agreement, codified in Section 27 of the 1899 New York State Indian Law, entrusted the state to collect and protect wampum belts on behalf of the Onondaga Nation.<sup>25</sup> Although the other member nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy never gave formal consent to this action, state authorities designated the New York State Museum as a wampum repository.<sup>26</sup>

Around 1893, another collection of wampum belts in the custody of Grand River Wampum Keepers John Skanawati Buck and James Jamieson began to disappear; some of these were sold by Buck's children after his death.<sup>27</sup> T. R. Roddy of the Indian Exhibits Company in Chicago acquired at least 11 belts, which he then advertised for sale to American museums (Fenton 1989). Ontario's Haudenosaunee chiefs circulated photographs of the missing wampum belts to museums in the United States and Canada (Hale 1883). They enlisted assistance from Duncan C. Scott of the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs, and also reached out to museum professionals Arthur Parker at the New York State Museum, Edward Sapir at the Victoria Museum, and Frank Speck at the University of Pennsylvania (Abrams 1994; Williams 1989).

Anthropological observers suggested that these wampum losses were indicative of cultural assimilation, factionalism, and the supposed privatization of regalia (e.g., Speck 1916). In fact, the losses were caused by external more than internal forces. More than 400 wampum belts left tribal custody without the permission of chiefs or tribal councils, through theft, confiscation, and deceit by unscrupulous individuals (Hill 2001; Williams 1989). Harriet Maxwell Converse, for example, convinced illiterate tribal leaders to sign receipts that were used as supposed "proof" of private ownership and legitimate sale.<sup>28</sup> Frank

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24 Harriet Maxwell Converse, a wealthy poet and social activist, was appointed an honorary chief among the Haudenosaunee and given the name *Ga-ie-wa-nob*, "The Watcher for the People," in 1891. The chiefs hoped that she would assist in negotiating political relations with state and federal authorities, but Converse claimed more authority than was intended. See statement from Onondaga Castle, September 18, 1891, Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation Records, 1890–1989, Series VI: Collectors, box 231, folder 5, National Museum of the American Indian. Also see Harriet Maxwell Converse (1892, 146–47).

25 New York State Indian Law § 27, NY L.1899, c. 150; amended L.1971, c. 960, eff. June 25, 1971; repealed 1992.

26 Haudenosaunee Grand Council of Chiefs, Onondaga Nation, February 2, 1986, Communiqué on Wampum as Cultural Patrimony. Copy in author's possession, used here with permission.

27 For a full discussion of the circumstances of these wampum losses, see Sally Weaver, "The Wampum Case," 1975. Unpublished manuscript in Sally Weaver Papers, Box 34, GA 89, pages 570–91, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.

28 For correspondence regarding these and other wampum removals, see Museum of the

Speck and others purchased wampum belts—sometimes for profit, sometimes for preservation. Tribal wampum keepers found it difficult to locate missing objects that had crossed tribal, state, and international borders. By 1900, very few of the historical wampum belts that had marked significant agreements—within Native nations, among Native nations, or between Native nations and colonial settler allies—were preserved in the hands of the allied parties; most had been relocated to museums. Antiquarians were eager to collect the surviving wampum belts that remained in the hands of Indigenous wampum keepers.

These belts were dispersed among multiple museums, including the American Museum of Natural History, British Museum, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, McCord Museum, Museum of the American Indian, and the Royal Ontario Museum, among many others. Writings about wampum during this era of removal (e.g., Beauchamp 1901; Speck 1916) primarily focused on simplistic identifications based on the assertions of collectors. These were uncritically incorporated into museum exhibitions, leading to categorizations of wampum as colonial relics, artistic objects, and private property (e.g., Ewing 1982), detached from living traditions.

Objects that circulate through multiple hands routinely accrue histories that reflect the social positions and relations of their handlers (Kopytoff 1986; Latour 1993). These handlers, by turns, also constitute and reconstitute their social identities by manipulating these objects (Hoskins 1998). In museums, collections often come to represent new “fields of relations” and processes of meaning-making, despite their former associations (Bell 2017, 245). In the case of wampum, what resulted was a discourse of dispossession that conceptually detached Native-made wampum belts from living Native nations, making them, in effect, strangers to themselves. The objects that had once recorded Indigenous memories and understandings became palimpsests for the construction of new narratives that marginalized their makers and obscured their origins. In museums, wampum belts were largely cataloged and classified as vague rather than specific, secular rather than sacred, and personal rather than tribal property.

The widespread loss of tribal control over both wampum material and wampum scholarship enabled an insidious logic to take hold in museum practice and public discourse. The scaffold of speculation looked something like this: if wampum was merely a relic of forgotten heritage, then there would be no need to consult with tribal leaders

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American Indian/Heye Foundation Records 1856–1993. Series 7: Registration, Box 299, Folder 12 and Box 315, Folders 19–21, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

about its meaning; if tribal governance was no longer extant, then wampum would be unnecessary to its continuance; if wampum was not essential to tribal survival, then it rightfully belonged in museums; if museums could not ascribe meanings to the wampum belts in their collections, then there was no meaning left to be recovered. For decades, non-Native experts asserted both physical and intellectual control over wampum by communicating these ideas as though they were facts (e.g., Becker 2002; Sturtevant et al. 1970).

The Haudenosaunee did not, however, either cease the practice of wampum ceremonialism or relinquish their claims to belts in museums. Tribal chiefs and their advocates (e.g., Irving Powless, Oren Lyons, Sid Hill, Paul Williams) protested the alienation of cultural patrimony as a violation of tribal sovereignty. In response to these entreaties, scholars like William Fenton insisted that tribal leaders could not distinguish one wampum belt from another, that Native oral traditions were unreliable, and that wampum should be construed as *American* rather than *Native American* heritage (Fenton 1971). By 1970, New York State legislators actually supported a bill to repatriate wampum to Onondaga, but the State Education Department characterized this as a dangerous precedent that “could destroy the concept of museums and libraries being collectors of anything” (“Iroquois Are Seeking” 1970; Figure 5).

#### TACTICS OF STRATEGIC ALIENATION

During the salvage era, Indigenous title to cultural patrimony was initially obscured by the physical removals of many sacred and patrimonial objects to museums. Conceptual relocations (from sacred to secular, patrimonial to private, tribal heritage to museum heritage, etc.) legitimized further removals. Wampum belts, like so many other objects, were stripped of their identity through idiosyncratic cataloging methods, possessive logics, narrative erasures, and skewed scholarship. The museological collection and curation of wampum belts became, in many instances, an exercise of colonizing power that detached objects from communities through the following tactics:

- Removal: Wampum belts were knowingly removed from tribal custody (thereby shifting the sense of ownership from tribal patrimony to private property).
- De-tribalization: Wampum belts were interpreted as relics of decayed governance that represented dead or dying Native nations and traditions (thereby detaching them from living traditions in extant Native nations).



THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 1970

## Iroquois Are Seeking Return of Wampum Belts Held by State Museum



Indians demonstrating outside the State Capitol in Albany yesterday to press their demand for the return of wampum

ALBANY, April 16 (AP)—Leaders of the Iroquois Confederacy appealed to New York officials today to return to them religious and political wampum belts in custody of the state under a 72-year-old agreement whose validity the Indians are challenging. Twenty-six wampum belts, valued at \$280,000, are in the State Museum here. Most are

in a vault; the others are on display.

The Indians want the belts, made of shell beads, returned to them for display at a planned museum and cultural center on Onondaga land near Syracuse.

The leaders came here to support proposed legislation that would abolish what the state says was an agreement

reached here in 1898 that made the State University of New York the official wampum-keeper.

But Irving Powless, an Onondaga chief and secretary of the Onondaga Nation, said today that no Indian had the authority to give away the belts.

A measure sponsored by Republican Assemblyman Joseph R. Pisani of New Ro-

chelle would terminate the 1898 accord and turn over the wampum for a museum to be maintained by the Onondagas.

The State Education Department, which administers the museum, opposes the bill on the ground it could set a precedent that "could destroy the concept of museums and libraries being collectors of anything."

FIGURE 5. By the 1970s, Haudenosaunee activists had become increasingly vocal in publicly protesting New York's authority as a wampum keeper. Article reprinted here courtesy of the *New York Times*, April 17, 1970.

- **Museumification:** Wampum belts were publicly exhibited as tangible heritage objects belonging to non-Native museums (thereby shifting the sense of ownership from tribal heritage to settler colonial national heritage).
- **Concealment:** Wampum belts were concealed and transported like valuable treasures, and information was hidden from potential claimants (by secretly purchasing them, concealing them during border crossings, and failing to share relevant information).
- **Display:** Wampum belts were (publicly) displayed and (privately) sold as valuable antiquities (thereby emphasizing their rarity as historic relics and their aesthetic value as decorative collectibles).

- Exoticization: Wampum belts were interpreted as inherently mysterious (thereby detaching them from historical records, oral traditions, and other identifying data and representing them as foreign to themselves).

Each of these tactics of strategic alienation, deployed singly or collectively, created further distance between these objects and the Indigenous communities that claimed them.

The Mohawk and Abenaki wampum belts were subjected to each of these tactics of alienation in the years that passed before they surfaced at Sotheby's in 2009. Separately, they had been removed from the custody of Indigenous people, passed through the hands of collectors, and accessioned into the collections at the Museum of the American Indian. Together, they had been sold out of the museum to an art dealer, who then sold them to a private collector. In 1982, they had been showcased as inherently mysterious "art objects" in a paradigmatic display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (see Ewing 1982). Relying solely on the data conveyed in that exhibition, Sotheby's experts had flatly stated that there was no possibility of associating these belts with any living Indigenous community. Research proved this assertion to be problematic.

The provenance history of the Abenaki wampum belt remains somewhat mysterious. It was the only northeastern Native object in John Jay White Jr.'s collection at MAI, and documentation has not yet surfaced to explain where he acquired it.<sup>29</sup> It has been confidently dated to the 1700s, and the members of the HSC have accepted the designation of this belt as Abenaki, believing it to be associated with the Abenaki along the Saint Lawrence.

The provenance history of the Mohawk wampum belt, on the other hand, was extraordinarily well-documented from the moment it left Kanesatake to the moment it arrived at Sotheby's. By crosswalking through multiple museums and archives, I discovered that the relocations of this belt had been recorded in surviving correspondence, account books, receipts, articles, depositions, and more. What resulted was much more than a mere "cultural biography" of the object (Kopytoff 1986) or a methodical mapping of this belt as a "thing in motion" (Appadurai 1986). These documents exposed the myriad ways in which

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29 The catalog card for MAI #11/123 indicates that Mrs. John Jay White (Grace Hoffman White, John's widow), loaned this "Abnaki" (a variant spelling of Abenaki) wampum belt to MAI in December 1926. The correspondence, however, indicates that the belt was accessioned by MAI on January 21, 1922. The rest of the White collection consists of Western Plains material from Montana. See Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation Records 1856–1993. Series 7: Registration, Box 316, Folder 12, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

the meanings of this particular belt had been intentionally manipulated to enable possession by different parties with different desires.

This Kanesatake Mohawk wampum belt thus serves as a fascinating representative case to illustrate the insidious effectiveness of tactics of strategic alienation. Over the course of nine decades, it was, by turns, de-tribalized, museologized, concealed, displayed, and exotized. Step by step, it was conceptually transformed—from tribal property into private property, ethnographic salvage, museum heritage, unknowable relic, desirable antiquity, and, finally, a high-value art object—with each representation entirely dependent upon who claimed ownership at any given point in time, despite evidence to the contrary.

*Tactical Removal: Wampum Belts Were Knowingly Removed from Tribal Custody*

The first removal occurred around 1910, when four Kanesatake wampum belts fell into the hands of French Canadian artifacts dealer J. B. Delay, shortly before he left Kanesatake to relocate to Temiskaming, Ontario (Speck 1916).<sup>30</sup> Delay coincidentally crossed paths with University of Pennsylvania anthropologist Frank Speck, who was collecting ethnographic specimens for his friend Edward Sapir, who had just been appointed Chief of the Anthropological Division at the Victoria Museum (now the Canadian Museum of History [CMH]). When Delay offered an old cradleboard and two Mohawk wampum belts for sale, Speck immediately notified Sapir:

It nearly knocked me over to see those belts. I won't dicker with the price on these until I hear from you and you can figure it out & let me know. Of course if I do get a little ahead in the wampum deal it will pay up some of Flo's [his wife, Florence Speck's] expenses in the field and help me out in some of my future work which is now all the more urgent to complete. (Speck, July 21, 1913)<sup>31</sup>

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30 Curtis Nelson (Tehanakarine), September 8, 2009, Declaration to the Haudenosaunee Standing Committee concerning Mohawk Wampum Belt at Sotheby's. Copy in author's possession, used here with permission. In the 1901 census for Oka/Kanesatake, Jean Baptiste Delay, born in France and identified as a *commerçant* (trader), is listed as married to Marie; this is likely his Mohawk first wife. See: Library and Archives Canada, *Fourth Census of Canada, 1901*. L'Annonciation, Deux-montagnes, Quebec; Page 8; Family No. 82. Series RG31. Microfilm reels: T-6428 to T-6556. In the 1911 census, Delay is living in Temiskaming County with a new young wife, named Eléonore, four of the children from his first marriage to Marie, and four additional children. See: Library and Archives Canada, *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911*, Pontiac, Quebec; Page 11; Family No. 44. Series RG31-C-1. Microfilm reels T-20326 to T-20460.

31 The correspondence between Speck and Sapir concerning the purchase of these wampum belts is archived at the CMH in Edward Sapir Correspondence 1-A-236M, Box 634 f.2 (1913–1914).



FIGURE 6. Stephanie Mach examines two Mohawk wampum belts (cataloged as III-I-929 and III-I-930) that were removed from Kanesatake, sold to Frank Speck in 1913, and then sold to Edward Sapir at the Victoria Museum (now the Canadian Museum of History). Photograph by Margaret M. Bruchac.

Speck paid \$100 to purchase both wampum belts, and then sold them to Sapir for \$200, making a considerable profit in the transaction. Those two Kanesatake wampum belts were cataloged by Sapir as III-I-929 and III-I-930, and they still rest in the collections of the Canadian Museum of History today (Figure 6).<sup>32</sup>

Speck then learned that Delay had two additional Kanesatake wampum belts for sale: one with five white diamonds and one with six white diamonds, both on a dark purple field. He purchased these as well, acknowledging that their pristine condition and related symbolism made them especially noteworthy (Speck 1916).<sup>33</sup> In all, Speck's trip to Temiskaming was very successful, resulting in the collection of more than 3,000 ethnographic objects for the Victoria Museum. The wampum belts, however, were the most lucrative finds.

32 Having personally examined all four of these wampum belts, I can confirm that there is no reason to suspect these to be anything other than authentic historical objects from the 18th century or a bit earlier. Their construction perfectly matches the most common wampum-weaving materials and techniques in use among Haudenosaunee artisans, and among St. Lawrence Mohawk communities in particular, during the early to mid-1700s.

33 Speck's expenses and purchases in Temagami and Temiskaming, including wampum, were recorded in an Account Book archived at the American Philosophical Society (APS), in the Frank Speck Papers, Mss. Ms. Coll. 126, Subcollection I, Series I Research Material, II Circumboreal, B Montagnais-Naskapi, 1 General Information, Box 2. Some of Speck's correspondence with Delay is archived at the APS, in "Wampum-Misc. Notes" in Subcollection I, Series I Research Material, III Northeast, A. General, Box 3.

It must be noted that, at the time, Speck and Sapir were not innocently conducting ethnographic salvage and making a little profit on the side. They were knowingly trafficking in possibly stolen cultural patrimony of the Six Nations, in the wake of the high-profile losses of other Haudenosaunee wampum belts. Less than a year after these transactions, Duncan C. Scott of the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs, who was working with the Six Nations Chiefs in Grand River Territory on wampum recovery, reached out to Speck and Sapir to request their assistance in locating lost wampum belts. Speck made no mention of the belts he had recently purchased; instead, he asked Chief Josiah Hill to mail a photograph of the wampum belts that were missing from tribal custody.<sup>34</sup> Upon receipt of the photograph, Speck immediately (and wrongly) jumped to the conclusion that the wampum belts then on display at the University Museum (now the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) were the ones that Chief Hill was searching for.

Speck and Sapir deliberated at length about how to handle this information. George Gustav Heye, founder of the Heye Foundation/Museum of the American Indian, had temporarily deposited most of his Native collection at the museum in Philadelphia. Since Heye was one of Speck's patrons, and the university was Speck's place of employment, he was concerned that "divulgence of all the facts relative to the belts may make it unpleasant for the University Museum" (Speck to Sapir, May 13, 1914, CMH).<sup>35</sup> So, Sapir took the lead, by notifying Scott that Heye had possession of the stolen wampum belts. In his letter, he insisted "that as little use as possible be made of either Speck's or my own name in this matter" (Sapir to Scott, May 16, 1914, LAC).<sup>36</sup> Helpfully, Sapir articulated the proofs of tribal patrimonial ownership as follows:

. . . it will be absolutely necessary to have the Indians prove that the belts were tribal, and not individual property, and that they were stolen from the tribe as a whole, and not rightfully sold by an individual. Once this is done, there should be no essential obstacle to the restitution of the stolen property. (Sapir to Scott, May 16, 1914, LAC)

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34 Some of the correspondence concerning the search for lost wampum is archived at the APS, in the Frank Speck Papers, Mss. Ms. Coll. 126, Subcollection II, Series I, Correspondence 1903–1950. See, for example, letter from Hill to Speck, April 27, 1914.

35 Another part of this correspondence is archived at the CMH in Edward Sapir Correspondence 1-A-236M, Box 634 f.2 (1913–1914).

36 Yet another part of this correspondence is archived at the Library and Archives of Canada (LAC), in 1900–1915, Six Nations Agency—Reports, Correspondence and Memoranda Regarding the Theft of Eleven Wampum Belts from the Six Nations Reserve. Record Group 10, Vol. 3018, File 220, 155.



Scott then challenged Heye to account for his wampum purchases (Scott to Heye, June 11, 1914, LAC). At first, Heye denied having any wampum belts. Then, he claimed to have lost the letters. Then, he demanded proof of tribal ownership (Heye to Scott, October 15, November 6, 23, and 30, 1914, LAC).

Scott asserted that wampum was tribal patrimony that “could not be sold or disposed of in any way without the consent of the Tribes, which was never given” (Scott to Heye, October 28, 1914, LAC). At Speck’s urging, six Ohsweken chiefs—Richard Hill, Johnson Williams, Abram Charles, David Sky, John Buck Jr., and Robert Davy—then signed an affidavit formally declaring the lost belts to be tribal property (Six Nations Council to Scott, January 28, 1915, LAC). Under pressure, Heye finally acknowledged that he had purchased 11 wampum belts from T. R. Roddy of the “Indian Trading Company,” but he flatly refused to return them, claiming right of possession through legal purchase (Heye to Scott, December 5, 1914, LAC).

Curiously, throughout the entire Roddy investigation, Speck and Sapir never notified either the Haudenosaunee chiefs or the Canadian authorities about their own transactions in (and possession of) Kanesatake wampum belts. Perhaps, in light of the controversy, they were merely keeping their heads down. Sapir had assured Scott that if one could prove that wampum was tribal property, there should be no obstacle to its return. Perhaps he and Speck planned to strategically turn this logic in reverse, by proving (or at least convincingly asserting) that their wampum had been rightfully purchased from a private individual. Speck’s next move suggests the latter.

*Tactical De-tribalization: Wampum Belts Were Interpreted as Relics of Decayed Governance*

In 1915, one year after the Roddy outcry and two years after purchasing four Kanesatake wampum belts, Frank Speck decided to publicize his possession of them. Although his research on wampum was still in its very early stages, Speck positioned himself as a wampum authority. In a public address to the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia, he stated that wampum ceremonialism was in decline at Kanesatake (then called Lac des Deux Montagnes, “lake of two mountains,” or Oka). The Oka Mohawk band had, he said, “severed its relations with the ancient Iroquois league,” and the wampum belts had devolved into personal property and “treasures and insignia of chieftainship” (Speck 1916, 128). Questioning how Christian Indians came to possess wampum belts at all, he speculated:



FIGURE 7. (Left) The six-diamond wampum belt and five-diamond wampum belt from Kanesatake are shown in a black and white photograph taken by Frank G. Speck (1915, figures 66 and 67). (Right) The same two wampum belts are shown at Kanesatake after their reunification, in a photograph taken by Margaret M. Bruchac in 2018.

. . . some of the early Christian seceders from the [Iroquois] league must have been sachems of influence to have enabled them to carry away to their Christian settlements these wampum belts which have since remained in the possession of their families, not as documents of the league, but as treasures and insignia of chieftainship. (Speck 1916, 128)

In this same lecture (which was published soon afterward), Speck introduced an odd interpretation of wampum symbolism that does not correspond with any other oral or written tradition. He suggested that “the white figures on the blue background denoted ‘chiefs’, the more elaborate the figure, the higher in rank was the chief” (Speck 1916, 128; see Figure 7). Where did Speck get these ideas? In his article, he (falsely) suggests that wampum specimens were “very rare” and admits to piecing together “archaeological vestiges, mythical and historical fragments, and modern ethnological information” (Speck 1916, 121), but there is no evidence that he interviewed the wampum keepers at Kanesatake. Instead, his informant was J. B. Delay, the antiquities dealer he met in Temiskaming. Delay was not Native, he held no leadership status in any tribal nation, and Speck had privately admitted to Edward Sapir that Delay’s information was “worthless scientifically”



(Speck to Sapir, July 10, 1913, CMH). Why, then, did he uncritically repeat this “worthless” information in print?

Speck was, by his own admission, confused about Indigenous identity, leadership, religious practices, and land tenure at Kanesatake (see Speck 1919). Where he had expected to find only “authentic” “Mohawk” people, he encountered Algonquin, Nipissing, and Huron-Wendat families,<sup>37</sup> as well as the white descendants of French colonial settlers (see Pouliot-Thisdale 2016; Swain 2010).<sup>38</sup> Even more confusing, Kanesatake (like the nearby community of Kahnawake) appeared to be religiously syncretic, with practitioners of Longhouse, Catholic, and Methodist traditions coexisting in the same community. As Kahnawake Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson has observed, it was difficult for anthropologists to grapple with evidence of Indigenous diversity and adaptation, since their goal was to “fetishize and entrap” essentialized versions of Indigenous customs, practices, and objects “for preservation against a social and political death that was foretold but did not happen” (Simpson 2014, 113). Ironically, accommodations to modernity made communities seem to be less authentically “Indian.” Even more ironically, the anthropological collecting of Indigenous objects (especially objects that were crucial to the maintenance of cultural traditions) threatened the survival of the very cultures it strove to preserve (Bruchac 2018).

The Mohawk people of Kanesatake had persisted, and had maintained political connections with their Haudenosaunee kin, despite successive waves of threat from white colonial settlers and missionaries vying for control (Blanchard 1983; Gabriel-Doxtater and Van den Hende 1995; Horn 1991). Since the early 1710s, tribal leaders had managed an uneasy relationship with the Sulpician Seminary that acted as stewards of the seigneurie of Lac des Deux Montagnes (Pouliot-Thisdale 2016; Swain 2010). Since the 1870s, they had resisted the impositions of the Canadian Indian Act<sup>39</sup> by largely avoiding elections and maintaining Longhouse systems of authority (Hill 2009; Swain 2010). Here, as elsewhere in Canada, tribal leaders also strove to retain the

37 *Algonquin*, as used here, is the historical tribal name of the bands known today as the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg and Rapid Lake Algonquin. They are culturally “Algonkian” rather than “Iroquoian.”

38 The entanglement of these communities happened in the early 1700s, during the relocation of the Sault au Recollet Indian Mission founded by the Saint Sulpice Seminary in Montreal (Swain 2010). The land grant at Lac des Deux Montagnes established two separate self-governing villages—the Algonquin community at Oka, and the Mohawk community at Kanesatake—with the Sulpician church situated between them (York and Pindera 1991).

39 Formerly the “Gradual Enfranchisement Act” in Laws of Canada, Chapter 18: “An Act to amend and consolidate the laws respecting Indians” (April 12, 1876). Accessed May 30, 2017 at “Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada,” Government of Canada, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100010252/1100100010254>.

power of women's councils, despite the patriarchal nature of the settler colonial agents that surrounded them (Gabriel-Doxtater and Van den Hende 1995; Horn 1991). Tribal leaders at Kanesatake—most notably Chiefs Joseph Kanawatiron (Kennatosse), Angus Corinthe, Baptiste Gaspé, and Peter Oka—had repeatedly argued against the Sulpicians to reclaim their Indigenous title to the seigneurie, but lost their state-assisted appeal to the British Privy Council in 1912 (York and Pindera 1991).<sup>40</sup> At the moment that Frank Speck showed up, the Sulpician Order was already beginning the process of selling off thousands of acres of tribal property, despite tribal protests (Swain 2010).

In earlier generations, relations were such that some chiefs had entrusted wampum belts to the Church for safekeeping. For example, the priest and curate S. R. Tranchemontagne recalled that one important belt was rescued from an 1877 fire in the old church, and was brought to him by an “old Indian” to be “saved and deposited within our walls after that occasion.”<sup>41</sup> By 1913, however, that trusting relationship had taken a more troubling turn. Recognizing the wampum belts as both valuable historical relics and material markers of contested tribal land claims, church agents sought to “dispose of the wampums in an attempt to deny the authority of the Council of Chiefs and to undermine the land rights actions” (Hill 2009, 20). In 1916, Tranchemontagne sold the belt that was entrusted to his care to a Montreal coin collector, who subsequently sold it to the American Museum of Natural History.<sup>42</sup> He or another church agent may have been similarly implicated in Delay's acquisition of the wampum belts that were sold to Speck.<sup>43</sup>

This much is clear: religious life and practice at Kanesatake was complicated. When he first arrived, Speck imagined that wampum ceremonialism was incompatible with Catholicism. Over time, as he conducted further research, his assessment changed dramatically. Speck

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40 The struggle to recover control over these tribal lands continues to this very day. In 1990, it broke out into an Indigenous occupation and protest, under siege by the Canadian Army, when an endangered site—a burial ground located in a pine grove—was threatened by the proposed expansion of a golf course. See Alanis Obomsawin's (1993) documentary film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*.

41 Tranchemontagne sold this wampum belt to the Montreal coin collector Pierre Napoleon Breton, noting, “The belt of wampum is very ancient. An old Indian assures me that he remembers having seen it mostly all the years of his life in the old church which was burned in June 1877 . . . [it] was saved and deposited within our walls after that occasion.” Letter from S. R. Tranchemontagne to P. N. Breton, December 27, 1916. In 1917, Breton sold this belt to the American Museum of Natural History, where it was cataloged as 50.2-582 and is presently on display.

42 Ibid.

43 The other religious leaders in the Sulpician Mission at Oka/Kanesatake during the 1910s included Father Daniel Joseph Lefebvre (1895–1915) and his assistant Urgel Lafontaine (Cyr 2011).

harbored concerns that Mohawk lifeways had been influenced by their long residence alongside Algonkian neighbors, but he argued convincingly that Haudenosaunee Longhouse traditions and wampum ceremonialism were very much alive and well (Speck 1923). He even stepped up to deflect pressures from Methodist missionaries who were then pressing their way into Kanesatake and Kahnawake. In 1925, Speck wrote:

They have maintained their own form of worship of the Great Spirit with traditional ceremonies, causing much irritation to the evangelical agencies by their conservatism and their faith, as they express it, to the traditions of their forefathers. . . . I have observed that it is not the most ignorant nor unprogressive of the bands who have sought spiritual consolation in the return to native belief, but rather the more thrifty and educated.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Speck's recognition that traditional practices had survived at Kanesatake, he never corrected the statements in his 1916 article. Given his practice of updating other research conclusions, it is troubling that he allowed the assumption that wampum belts had devolved into privately owned relics to stand without correction. Perhaps, like so many other collectors at the time, he treasured his wampum purchases, and was simply unwilling to give them back.

*Tactical Museumification: Wampum Belts Were Publicly Claimed as Museum Property*

In 1929, Speck sold the five-diamond and six-diamond Kanesatake wampum belts he had purchased from Delay to George Gustav Heye. For more than four decades, the two belts rested in the collections at MAI in New York City, along with approximately 40 other wampum belts from other collectors and other tribal nations, acquired under similarly fraught circumstances.<sup>45</sup> Although Haudenosaunee activists were actively seeking to recover patrimonial wampum, they did not know precisely which wampum belts were trapped in which collections, and they were not allowed to access the provenance data and transaction details hidden away in private papers and correspondence.<sup>46</sup>

44 Frank Speck, 1925, "Canadian Christian Indians Revert to Pagan Beliefs." Manuscript in Frank Speck Papers, Mss. Ms. Coll. 126, Series I: Research Material, III Northeast, B Iroquois, Box 4 (6B1p), General Iroquois, Religion. APS.

45 Frank Speck's correspondence with Heye is archived in the Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation Records 1928–1941. Series 6: Collectors. Box 274, folder 1. Smithsonian Institution Archives. Inventories of other wampum belts can be found in Series 7: Registration. Box 316, folders 1–3, Wampum Belts of the Six Nations Confederacy. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

46 Some of the Six Nations wampum claims and complaints are archived in the Museum

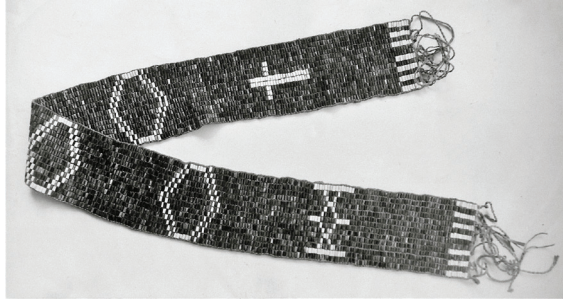


FIGURE 8. Wampum belt acquired in the early 1900s by Brother Cyprien from Oka/Kanesatake, sold to George Gustav Heye, and accessioned into the Museum of the American Indian as MAI #200839. This belt is still in the National Museum of the American Indian collections today. Photograph by Frank Speck, courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

Idiosyncratic patterns of object cataloguing and curation added other layers of difficulty (Bruchac 2010). At MAI, as elsewhere, the widespread museological practice of “curating secrets” enabled museums to retain collections and maintain existing power structures, while ignoring the demands of repatriation activists (Colwell 2015, 2017).

Despite his passionate advocacy for Haudenosaunee wampum recovery in the 1910s, Speck took no action in later years when other wampum belts resurfaced in the hands of collectors. Perhaps this is because his relationship with Heye had become less contentious and more lucrative. In 1939, for example, Speck received a letter from the Indiana Historical Society on behalf of Brother Cyprien, who identified himself as the “owner” of a wampum belt obtained, “a number of years ago from the Oka [Kanesatake] tribe near Montreal” (Black to Speck, March 20, 1939, APS). Speck never notified anyone at Kanesatake about this belt. Instead, he appraised the value and interpreted the design so that Brother Cyprien could be assured of making a lucrative sale to a museum. Cyprien sold the belt to Heye, and it is still in the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) collections today (cataloged as MAI #200839; see Figure 8).<sup>47</sup>

By the mid-20th century, more than 400 wampum belts had been scattered into the collections of more than 40 museums in North America, in addition to museums in Europe. Haudenosaunee chiefs decided to focus most of their repatriation efforts on the Museum of

of the American Indian/Heye Foundation Records 1856–1993. Series 7: Registration. Box 316, folder 4, Wampum Belts of the Six Nations Confederacy. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

47 Photograph from the Frank G. Speck Papers at the APS, Mss. Ms. Coll.126, Series III Photographs 572.97, Wampum belts 1913–1952, 10–41 (a–b).

the American Indian and the New York State Museum (NYSM). In the former, they strove to recover belts that had been taken away from the Six Nations in Canada. In the latter, they hoped to overturn the state's formal role as wampum keeper. Although the wampum belts at NYSM were not in apparent danger of being lost or sold again, their roles as living tools of ritual diplomacy had been interrupted while they sat in stasis in glass cases.<sup>48</sup> In a 1967 interview, Onondaga Chief George Thomas insisted that his predecessors did not expect to relinquish ownership in perpetuity. They "thought they were only lending the belts to New York State. . . . The way I was told about it was that any time we wanted the wampum back the people [in the museum] would gladly give them back." Yet, "after they got all the wampum, they locked it up," and refused to allow the chiefs access (Thomas quoted in Maiorana 1967).

The staunchest opponent to wampum repatriation was William Fenton, who served as director of the NYSM from 1956 to 1969, and who also served as a trustee at MAI. Fenton was widely regarded as the reigning expert on Haudenosaunee research (e.g., Fenton 1998). In a 1970 letter to *Akwesasne Notes*, he complained:

I too believe that every society has a right to pursue its own destiny, but I do not believe that the descendants of the old Five Nations would be materially advanced by returning to them the wampum belts in the New York State Museum which were acquired by out-right purchase, by gift, and by deed of trust. Most of the belts are on permanent exhibition; they can be seen any weekday by anyone, and those that are in the vault can be seen by arrangement with very little notice.<sup>49</sup>

Fenton continued his diatribe in a scholarly article, noting that "claims for the restoration of cultural objects" had dramatically increased (Fenton 1971, 437). He denigrated the "myth-making" "Indian militants" who claimed that the wampum belts had been sold "illegally, and not according to their customs" (451). He insisted that wampum belts constituted American, not Haudenosaunee heritage, and that their political use was neither ancient nor Indigenous, but was a colonial invention, "as American as apple pie" (437).

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<sup>48</sup> The belts seemed to be under almost supernatural protection in the NYSM, according to State Archaeologist Arthur Parker, who described their condition after a devastating fire on March 29, 1911: "None of the wampum belts of the Six Nations was injured. One of the odd features of the calamity was that hardly a single object connected with the ceremonies of the Iroquois totemic cults or the religious rites was injured. The hair of the 30 medicine masks that hung in a line across the westernmost cases was not even singed" (Parker 1911, 171).

<sup>49</sup> Clipping of William N. Fenton's letter to *Akwesasne Notes* (Winter 1970), William N. Fenton Papers, Series I: Correspondence, box 33, APS.

William Sturtevant, Donald Collier, Ernest Dodge, and several other members of the Committee on Anthropological Research in Museums joined Fenton in promoting these beliefs. In a 1970 letter to the American Anthropological Association, they claimed that the wampum at the New York State Museum had virtually no connection to the practice of Haudenosaunee tradition; instead, they claimed, it merely “commemorated largely political agreements arrived at with the Indians at Albany” (Sturtevant et al. 1970, 4). In a stern editorial in the 1970 issue of *Indian Historian*, they denounced Haudenosaunee assertions about wampum’s sacredness as an invented “illusion of religiosity” (Sturtevant et al. 1970):

We deplore the principle of returning such treasures to the acculturated descendants of the original owners lest a precedent be established. . . . The implication of such an act undermines the whole philosophy and practice of museology everywhere. . . . State property should not be legislated away lightly in the illusion of religiosity or as capital in the civil rights movement.

In his private correspondence, Fenton took this argument a step further by insisting that “the Iroquois Confederacy as such has no existence at present except in the minds of a few members.”<sup>50</sup>

*Tactical Concealment: Wampum Belts Were Concealed and Transported Like Valuable Treasures, and Information Was Hidden from Potential Claimants*

Six decades after Frank Speck’s 1913 trip to Kanesatake, and two decades after his death in 1950, his widow Florence wrote a letter to one of Frank’s former students, Edmund Carpenter. The year was 1972, and Florence had just learned about a Haudenosaunee protest at a Sotheby’s auction (see Montgomery 1972). She was stunned to learn that the objects for sale included ceremonial masks that Frank had purchased and deposited in a museum for safekeeping. Fearful that other Haudenosaunee materials might be at risk, she told Carpenter:

The Indians have been trying to buy back the wampum belts which Frank had bought from a man in Canada. I was with him when we went there. . . . I carried the belts in a dark green bag, like all the students carried with their books. Later on we took the beaded belts to the State Museum at Albany and gave them for safe keeping. The

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<sup>50</sup> William N. Fenton to Warren A. Snyder, April 17, 1970, William N. Fenton Papers, Series I: Correspondence, box 32, APS.



Indians have been trying to get them back. (Florence Speck, October 27, 1972)<sup>51</sup>

Frank, she claimed, had purchased the belts out of the fear that if they were returned to the tribe, Native people “would sell them again.” Was she spurred to action because these objects at Sotheby’s were endangered? Or was she perhaps grappling with unexpressed guilt? Florence had been the direct beneficiary of Frank’s wampum trafficking in 1913, when (as he told Sapir) his profits were used to cover the costs of her lodging and travel. Florence’s “dark green bag” had apparently offered a convenient means of concealing the belts in their possession when they crossed the border back to the United States, since Canadian authorities were then actively searching for wampum belts stolen from First Nations communities.

In her letter, Florence confused the “State Museum at Albany” for the “Museum of the American Indian in New York,” which might explain why the letter went unanswered. Yet Carpenter, who was then a trustee at MAI, could easily have located information on the belts in question by checking Speck’s wampum inventories and accession cards at MAI. Inexplicably, he never did. Nor did he make any effort to determine which Indians were seeking to “buy back the wampum belts.”

In a suspicious coincidence, just four days after Florence wrote this letter, one of the very belts she expressed concern about (the five-diamond wampum belt from Kanesatake) was sold out of the MAI collections. Carpenter, who was apparently unaware of this sale, then held onto Florence’s letter for nine years without taking any action. In 1981, two years after Florence’s death, Carpenter forwarded the letter to Patrick Houlihan, Acting Director of the New York State Museum, who merely archived it in the uncataloged curatorial files.<sup>52</sup>

Thirteen years later, in 1994, Florence’s letter resurfaced during a routine inventory for Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) compliance. George Hamell, who was then Chair of the NYSM Repatriation Committee, was eager to resolve any “potentially embarrassing” misinformation, and he expressed his concern that “Mrs. Speck erred in her recollection of where the wampum belts were deposited.”<sup>53</sup> He sent the letter to William Fenton, who claimed to be intimately familiar with the wampum collections at

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51 Florence Speck to Edmund Carpenter, October 27, 1972, in uncataloged curatorial files at the New York State Museum Archives, Albany, NY.

52 See letter from Edmund Carpenter to NYSM “Director” (Patrick Houlihan), April 5, 1981, and letter from Houlihan to Carpenter, April 15, 1981, in uncataloged curatorial files at the New York State Museum Archives, Albany, NY.

53 Letter from George Hamell to William Fenton, June 15, 1994, in uncataloged curatorial files at the New York State Museum Archives, Albany, NY.

both NYSM and MAI. Yet, Fenton had no memory of any wampum belts collected by Speck, and he suggested (wrongly) that “the belts may have been deposited with the Peabody Museum.” The inquiry dead-ended when Frederick Dodge at the Peabody Essex Museum responded that he had no knowledge of any wampum belts collected by Speck.<sup>54</sup> At no point did these museum professionals seek advice from any Native consultants; instead, they simply judged Florence’s memories to be faulty and tucked the letter back into the NYSM’s private archives.

Six years later, in 2000, Six Nations at Grand River Attorney Paul Williams received copies of these letters during a routine repatriation consultation. Neither Hamell nor anyone else at NYSM felt that these letters were relevant to any pending cases, but Williams archived them in hopes of making a connection at some future date. In 2011, when Williams shared some of his research files with me, I immediately recognized the reference to the Kanesatake wampum belts that Frank purchased in 1913. This was obvious because it was the only occasion (in his 40-year-long career) when Frank had purchased wampum belts in Canada while Florence was with him. Her presence and his purchases were recorded in his collecting journal, his account book, and his correspondence with Sapir.<sup>55</sup>

*Tactical Display: Wampum Belts Were (Publicly) Displayed and (Privately) Sold as Valuable Antiquities*

During the 1970s, as American Indian art was becoming an increasingly valuable commodity, MAI Director Frederick Dockstader began selling artifacts from the collection (Carpenter 2005; Force 1999). After learning that art dealers and private collectors had been invited to (as he put it) “go shopping at the museum’s storage depository,” William Sturtevant, Curator of Ethnology at the Smithsonian, complained that “to many scholars, selling privately any work from a primitive group is like selling a baby for adoption on the black market. . . . the object’s roots, its history, its vital statistics disappear” (Gordon 1974). Dockstader engaged in thousands of sales and trades from the collection, boasting, “Almost every recent major exhibition includes examples gained from those exchanges” (Dockstader 1989).

<sup>54</sup> William Fenton’s note on letter from George Hamell to William Fenton, June 15, 1994, in uncataloged curatorial files at the New York State Museum Archives, Albany, NY.

<sup>55</sup> As noted earlier, Speck’s Account Book mentioning wampum purchases is archived at the APS, and his correspondence with Edward Sapir is archived at the CMH. Florence’s presence on the trip to Temagami and Temiskaming is also noted in his “Account book and ledger,” archived in the Frank G. Speck Papers, Series III: Personal, B. Accounts, box 8, folder 6, at the Peabody Essex Museum.

In 1974, MAI Trustee Edmund Carpenter tipped off the New York State Department of Law, and State Attorney General Louis Lefkowitz launched a full investigation into the “surreptitious, wasteful and fraudulent exchange transactions between the museum and certain Indian-artifact dealers and collectors” at MAI (Gordon 1974). The court case—Lefkowitz v. Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation—led to the removals of the director and most of the trustees, and the museum was closed for restructuring (Force 1999).<sup>56</sup> Carpenter, who financed the expense of inventorying the remaining objects in the collections, identified 26,992 objects as having been “deaccessioned” or “exchanged” and 15,997 as “missing” altogether (Carpenter 2005, 144).

The records for most of those sales disappeared, but with reference to the wampum belts that left MAI, a few key records survived. Under oath, Douglas Ewing testified that he had started up a new business trading in American Indian art in the early 1970s, and that he did, indeed, consult with wealthy collectors in advance to determine which museum objects they were most interested in purchasing.<sup>57</sup> Ewing’s name appeared on a 1973 memo from James Economos, titled, “Objects form [*sic*] the Heye Foundation sold to Douglas Ewing.”<sup>58</sup> This memo, when matched up to MAI accession records, clearly identifies three wampum belts that Dockstader sold to Economos (who then flipped these objects to Ewing): one Haudenosaunee stepped rafter belt (MAI #17/5422), one Abenaki belt (MAI #11/123), and one Kanestake Mohawk belt (MAI #16/3827). Ewing subsequently sold the Haudenosaunee stepped rafter belt to the Canadian Museum of Man (now the Canadian Museum of History, where it remains in collections today).<sup>59</sup> Ewing sold the Abenaki and Mohawk belts to Herbert G.

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56 In 2009, Attorney Shannon Keller O’Loughlin filed a Freedom of Information Act request on behalf of the HSC to locate the files from the New York State Attorney General’s investigation. New York State Supreme Court 1977, Lefkowitz v. Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation, No. 41416175. Obtained via FOIL request 09506-747. Also see Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation Records. Series 1: Directors. Box 84, folder 13. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

57 Douglas Ewing testimony, in New York State Attorney General’s Office (NYSAGO) files 1972–1979: Investigation into the Museum of the American Indian. Obtained via FOIL request 09506-747.

58 James Economos 1973 memo, in New York State Attorney General’s Office (NYSAGO) files 1972–1979: Investigation into the Museum of the American Indian. Obtained via FOIL request 09506-747.

59 Ibid. The wampum belt accessioned as MAI #17/5422 was acquired c. 1930 by an unknown collector. In the spring of 1974, Dockstader sold this belt to Economos, who sold it to Ewing. On April 3, 1974, Ewing sold the belt to the Canadian Museum of Man (now the Canadian Museum of History), where it now resides under a new catalog number (III-I-1458).

Wellington; they remained in Wellington's private collection until 2009, when his sons advertised them for sale at Sotheby's.

The timing of the transactions among Dockstader, Economos, and Ewing is of interest, given the fact that Haudenosaunee activists were engaging in public protests to recover wampum belts during this same time. MAI records indicate that Dockstader "exchanged" the Abenaki belt to Economos on March 15, 1972; one year later, Economos sold it to Ewing, who then sold it to Wellington. The five-diamond Kanesatake Mohawk wampum belt was apparently so desirable that it was sold even before it left the museum. The Economos memo notes that it was sold to Ewing on September 27, 1972, but MAI records indicate that it did not leave the museum until more than a month later, on November 1, 1972, when it was formally "exchanged" out of the museum by Dockstader.

This timing might seem inconsequential, were it not for the testimony that surfaced during the Lefkowitz investigation. Carpenter stated, under oath, that Dockstader had taken advantage of the publicity surrounding a proposed Sotheby's auction of Charles Wray's collection of Seneca wampum in October 1972, to provide a distraction. He recalled:

Wampum belts are reasonably rare and they bring quite a bit of money. . . . Dockstader notified a number of militant Indian groups that some rare Wampum belts belonging to their tribe were going to be sold at Parke-Burnett [Sotheby Parke Bernet], and the Indians created a sufficient disturbance so the pieces were withdrawn from auction. Dockstader told me personally that he had done this and he took some pride in it and he introduced me to the Indians who were instrumental in achieving this.<sup>60</sup>

Carpenter went on to explain that while the Haudenosaunee activists were busy at the auction, "Dockstader quietly sold a Wampum belt that was of far greater importance." The dates are such that only one wampum belt fits these parameters: the five-diamond Kanesatake wampum belt, which was physically removed from MAI just two days after the Wray auction.

Lefkowitz was well aware of the unique value of wampum belts at the time; in his memo calling for an injunction against MAI, he identified wampum belts as iconic examples of irreplaceable objects, having a "peculiar and special interest not to be measured by money damages." Explaining the urgent need for a restraining order against MAI, he

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60 Edmund Carpenter's testimony, in New York State Attorney General's Office (NYSAGO) files 1972-1979: Investigation into the Museum of the American Indian. Obtained via FOIL request 09506-747.

noted that the “artifacts whose disposition would be prohibited under the restraining order herein would include items having special historic or educational value akin to the wampum mentioned above.”<sup>61</sup> The court-ordered 1975 inventory estimated that roughly 700,000 “specimens” were still safe in the MAI collections, but there had once been many more (Force 1999, 48–49). The records were so chaotic that the missing objects seemed almost impossible to identify and locate. In a 1982 letter to William Fenton, Carpenter complained:

Now that the Heye inventory is completed and the Wellington and Ottawa collections are being published, it's possible to match specimens missing from Heye, now present in the NMC [National Museum of Canada, now the Canadian Museum of History] & Wellington collections. The distinction between provenience & attribution takes on new meaning. The fucking bastards who stole this material faked proveniences to cover their tracks: dates, tribes, collectors, etc. (Carpenter to Fenton, October 30, 1982)<sup>62</sup>

Once the numbers were calculated, it became apparent that during Dockstader's tenure as director, an estimated 60,000 to 90,000 objects collected from Native Americans and First Nations left MAI's collections through sales, exchanges, and thefts (Carpenter 2005, 145). Apart from a few isolated cases, no concerted effort was ever made by MAI (or by NMAI) to recover these objects.

*Tactical Exoticization: Wampum Belts Were Interpreted as Inherently Mysterious*

The sudden availability of thousands of authentic, desirable, and well-preserved American Indian objects directly contributed to the emergence of the multi-million-dollar American arts and antiquities market. Among collectors, the old MAI tags were interpreted, not as designations of improperly removed museum property, but as markers of authenticity.<sup>63</sup> The thousands of objects that left MAI were no longer treated as either Indigenous property or museum heritage; now they were classed as private art (Carpenter 2005). Over time, the conceptual

61 Louis Lefkowitz, New York State Attorney's Office General Memo in Support of Injunction Against the Museum of the American Indian, 1972. Obtained via FOIL request 09506-747.

62 Fenton's correspondence with Carpenter is archived in the William N. Fenton Papers, Mss. Ms. Coll. 20, APS Collection, Philadelphia, Series I, Correspondence, 1897–1994.

63 I have spoken with four private antiquities collectors and dealers (all of whom have requested anonymity) in New England alone, who purchased objects (typically, at art auctions) that still have their MAI tags attached to them. More tellingly, having seen these tags, I can attest that they match up to objects that were once, but are no longer, present in the NMAI collections.

and legal distinctions between these differing categories for the same kinds of objects widened to such a degree that art collectors (until quite recently) were largely unwilling to even consider the possibility that these objects might have been improperly removed from their communities of origin. In both private and museum collections, wampum belts were increasingly represented as inherently mysterious and unknowable, conceptually detaching them from historical records, oral traditions, and other identifying data, and representing them as foreign to themselves.

For example, in 1982 a new exhibition opened up at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) in New York City, featuring a stunning collection of American Indian objects gathered together by Douglas Ewing from several private collections. The display was arranged to emphasize not the historical origins or Indigenous identities, but the aesthetic appeal of these objects as works of art. Several prized items from the Wellington Collection were on display, including a Mohawk wampum belt (MAI #16/3827) and an Abenaki wampum belt (MAI #11/123), both still bearing their MAI identification tags. In the display text and accompanying catalog, Ewing (falsely) insisted that for these belts and, by extension, for all wampum belts, “it is all but impossible to make specific tribal affiliations” (Ewing 1982, 87). The unspoken assumption was that, therefore, these objects stood on their own as iconic art objects. Collectors need not be concerned with either conducting historical research or consulting with living Native nations. When the MMA exhibition closed, the two wampum belts were folded back into the private Wellington collection, where they remained out of sight to Native claimants until resurfacing at the Sotheby’s auction in 2009.

#### LEGISLATED CHANGE IN IDENTIFYING WAMPUM BELTS

During the 1980s, the Grand Council of Haudenosaunee Chiefs circulated a treatise to museums and historical societies, informing them that the reclamation of wampum was a human rights issue:

The possession of wampum by museums, state agencies, historical societies, universities and private collectors is a violation of our human rights, and our communal rights, religious freedom and is an infringement on our sovereignty. These sacred wampum belts and strings are an inalienable heritage of our nations, individually and collectively.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Haudenosaunee Grand Council of Chiefs (HGC), February 2, 1986, Onondaga Nation Communiqué re: Wampum. Wampum Files at the Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Six



In response, one museum director was moved to make a dramatic change. Martin Sullivan, who had inherited the title of *Ho-sen-na-ge-tah* (wampum keeper) upon being appointed director of NYSM, reached out to chiefs at Onondaga to welcome negotiations for wampum repatriation (Sullivan 1992). He accepted what the Haudenosaunee had been saying for more than a century: that Indigenous national patrimony could not properly be sold by anyone, not even a wampum keeper (Sullivan 1992). On June 14, 1989, the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York voted to allow the museum to return 12 wampum belts to the Onondaga Nation; the report listed three “Principles for Repatriation,” as follows: “A. The belts are communal property. B. The Onondaga claim is legitimate. C. The proposed action is prudent.”<sup>65</sup> A few years later, in 1992, New York state legislators overturned the 1899 Indian Law and formally relinquished the state’s role as wampum keeper.<sup>66</sup>

This move was inspired, in part, by the actions of trustees at MAI, who made similar shifts in thinking in 1988, when they finally agreed to repatriate 11 Haudenosaunee wampum belts to the Six Nations at Grand River, Ontario. The historical records were a bit confused, since some people believed (at the time) that these belts were part of the collection sold to Heye by Roddy decades earlier (Abrams 1994; Fenton 1989; Tooker 1998). Evidence was provided by the Union of Ontario Indians to prove that “the belts were taken from Grand River territory without proper authorization—in effect, stolen” (“11 Wampum Belts” 1988; Williams 1989). The confusion was such that curators and claimants had difficulty reaching agreement about the precise number of wampum belts that were candidates for repatriation; as a result, at least 30 wampum belts (including the six-diamond Kanasatake belt) were kept in collections, due to uncertainties about their provenance.<sup>67</sup>

In the aftermath of these wampum repatriations from the NYSM and MAI, two groundbreaking federal laws were passed that

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Nations Polytechnic Institute, Ohsweken, Ontario, Canada. Copy in author’s possession, used here with permission.

65 State Education Department, 1989, Proposed Return of 12 Wampum Belts to the Onondaga Nation. University of the State of New York. Copy archived in Wampum Files at the Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Six Nations Polytechnic Institute, Ohsweken, Ontario, Canada.

66 New York State Indian Law § 27, L. 1992, c. 612, sec. 1, eff. July 24, 1992. Indian Law § 27 History.

67 Martin Sullivan, September 15, 1995, Reviewer’s Report on Request by Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations) for Repatriation of Wampum Belts, Strings, and Beads. Prepared for the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution Repatriation Office. Copy archived in Wampum Files at the Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Six Nations Polytechnic Institute, Ohsweken, Ontario, Canada.

permanently shifted interpretations of Indigenous property in museums. In 1989, the U.S. Congress passed the National Museum of the American Indian Act (NMAIA Public Law 101-185), formally transferring legal stewardship of the entire Heye Foundation/Museum of the American Indian collections to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, where it would serve as the core collection of the new National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). The NMAI Act also dictated that the museum was required to report and consult with Native American Indigenous nations regarding the identification and potential repatriation of human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and items of cultural patrimony in the collections, including wampum (NMAIA Public Law 101-85; also see Public Law 104-278).

In 1990, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was approved by the U.S. Congress. This Act required all institutions and projects that receive federal funding or fall under federal jurisdiction (including museums, schools, libraries, etc.) to also report and consult on human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and items of cultural patrimony (McKeown and Hutt 2003; Trope and Echo-Hawk 2000). This legislation was intended to, at least in part, reverse the damage caused by anthropological salvage (Nafziger and Dobkins 1999; Brown and Bruchac 2006).

Under NAGPRA, “the Confederacy Wampum Belts of the Iroquois” were explicitly identified as iconic examples of cultural patrimony, defined as objects “having ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the Native American group or culture itself” (NAGPRA 1995, 43 C.F.R. § 10.2[d][4]).<sup>68</sup> In theory, cultural patrimony is considered to be communal tribal property regardless of the manner of its acquisition by a museum. Items owned by a nation (identified under NAGPRA as a “tribe”) “cannot be alienated, appropriated, or conveyed by any individual regardless of whether or not the individual is a member of the Indian tribe” (NAGPRA 1990, 25 U.S.C. § 3001[3][D]). Yet, in practice, Indigenous cultural patrimony can be difficult to locate within a museum collection, especially in cases where it is difficult to explain precisely how objects arrived in the collection, or to reconcile the confusion imposed by labels (e.g., relic, art object, private property) (Bruchac 2010; Colwell 2015).

Federal museums are required to provide NAGPRA inventories, but private individuals, art dealers, and foreign museums are not. So, in practice, this splits Indigenous “patrimony” into two categories. Only objects in federal collections are subject to NAGPRA laws, and therefore readily subject to consideration as “tribal property” that might be

<sup>68</sup> For the current law, regulations, and guidance on NAGPRA, see information from the National Park Service at <https://www.nps.gov/nagpra/mandates/INDEX.HTM>.

claimed as patrimonial. Technically (although not ethically), all Indigenous objects in private collections are broadly classed as “private property,” even if they can be documented as national patrimony, and especially if they were removed from federal museum collections before 1990. Private property can be freely sold. Thus, repatriation claims are most often successful *only* if Indigenous nations can actually locate and document their property, and *only* if it happens to be present in a federal museum’s collection (Bruchac 2010; Brown and Bruchac 2006; Carpenter 2005).

#### FINDING THE WAY BACK HOME

In 1997, the Onondaga Nation reclaimed an additional 73 wampum items (including belts, strings, and loose beads) from NMAI; the Reviewer’s Report, prepared by Martin Sullivan, unequivocally identified all of these as “items associated with ceremonial and diplomatic activities at the confederacy, nation, or clan levels, where they function as community property rather than individually owned objects” (Sullivan 1992). This was not an easy task. G. Peter Jemison, former chair of the HSC and Seneca faith keeper, recalled that “the challenge of getting back cultural patrimony that belonged to individual nations and communities on both sides of the border was an exercise in extreme patience.”<sup>69</sup> The evidence and curatorial assessments of each wampum object and each nation of origin had to be formally accepted at every level of the museum from the curatorial committee, to the director, and to the trustees, before it could be signed off by the legal department. The Haudenosaunee claimants also had to, as Jemison put it, “educate those within the Smithsonian Institution bureaucracy who refused to acknowledge our present day existence as a Confederacy.”<sup>70</sup>

On December 31, 1997, NMAI agreed to repatriate three additional “sacred and ceremonial” wampum items, one of which was the six-diamond Kanesatake wampum belt (MAI #16/3826) that had been purchased from J. B. Delay and deposited at MAI by Frank Speck in 1929 (Figure 9).<sup>71</sup> This wampum belt (identified in the report as a “Condolence Belt”) was reclaimed by the HSC on behalf of the Mohawk and held for safekeeping by the Onondaga Nation while a search was conducted for its companion, the five-diamond Kanesatake

<sup>69</sup> Email from G. Peter Jemison to Margaret M. Bruchac, May 23, 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Information from Receipt and Release agreement between the Haudenosaunee Stranding Committee on Burial Rules and Regulations and the National Museum of American Indian, in accordance with the NMAI Act (20 U.S.C. Section 80q et Seq.), December 31, 1997. Copy in author’s possession, used here with permission.



FIGURE 9. Kanesatake Mohawk Chief Curtis Nelson holds the six-diamond wampum belt that was purchased by Frank Speck, sold to MAI, repatriated to Onondaga, and finally returned to Kanesatake in 2014. Shown on the computer screen is the five-diamond belt that was also purchased by Speck and sold to MAI, and, after a long journey, finally returned to Kanesatake in 2017. Photograph by Lise Puyo for the Wampum Trail. Courtesy of Margaret M. Bruchac.

wampum belt (MAI #16/3827) that was then missing from the NMAI collections.

Although the five-diamond belt was instantly recognizable when it finally resurfaced at Sotheby's in 2009, its recovery took far longer than anyone had anticipated. This was not for lack of documentation. The most obvious evidence was on the original collection card (still preserved in the archives at NMAI) that noted the tribe of origin, locale, collector, date of deposit, and date of exchange for private sale. Tribal chiefs, lawyers, and members of the HSC had provided Sotheby's with hundreds of pages of evidence, including oral testimony, material analyses, copies of Frank Speck's correspondence, and the entire records of the 1972–1979 New York MAI investigation. Yet, neither Sotheby's lawyers nor the Wellington heirs were convinced; instead, they held fast to their opinion that it was impossible to identify wampum belts.

For the next eight years, while the HSC engaged in diplomatic efforts behind the scenes, I pursued a broad survey of wampum in other museum collections, finding ever-more-extensive documentation of similar patterns of circulation and alienation in other communities and collections (Bruchac 2017). After several years of very careful and critical review of the extant scholarly literature on wampum, I realized that, throughout much of the 20th century, the predominant scholars writing about wampum (e.g., Beauchamp 1901; Fenton 1971; Speck 1916) had largely focused on contested interpretations of wampum ownership and simplified interpretations of symbolism, without paying sufficient attention to either the materiality of the objects themselves or the evidence of alienation in the correspondence of collectors. Consultations with tribal leaders were typically rooted in the presumption that recoverable knowledge was inevitably “fragmentary” if not altogether missing (Speck 1925, 10).<sup>72</sup> Research on wampum construction had been similarly skewed, with the emphasis largely focused on distinguishing evidence of European influence—glass beads, metal drill bits, and settler colonial wampum manufacture (e.g., Becker 2002; Orchard 1929; Fenton 1971) that might somehow disprove Indigenous origins. Few scholars were willing to consider the possibility that wampum-making could be a fluid, syncretic, and adaptable practice incorporating both new and old materials, rather than a relic fixed in an irretrievable past. Although there had been a number of successful wampum repatriations in the years after 1988, it was clear from the scholarly discourse (e.g., Tooker 1998), that even these events had not altered the public perception that historical wampum belts were inherently mysterious, unidentifiable, and unaffiliated.

The two wampum belts from the Sotheby’s case rested in darkness until 2017, when Charles H. Wellington, one of the heirs to his father’s estate, passed away, and his brothers, James and William, had a change of heart. In April, they approached Oren Lyons, who was in New York City for a meeting of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. After stating that they had something that did not belong to them, the Wellingtons handed over the long-awaited wampum belts.

A few months later, in August 2017, during the regular gathering of the Haudenosaunee Council of Chiefs at Onondaga, the five-diamond wampum belt was formally handed over to Chief Curtis Nelson. He

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72 Some of the confusion about historical wampum meanings and use in the 1700s, and the apparent fragmentation of knowledge in the early 1900s, was introduced by scholars. For example, Frank Speck and several other scholars conflated the “Eastern Algonkian Wabanaki Confederacy” that has continually linked Algonkian nations with the “Seven Nations Confederacy” that, during part of the 1700s–1800s, linked both Algonkian and Iroquoian nations and bands (see Speck 1915).





FIGURE 10. Condoled Chief Curtis Nelson (Kanesatake Mohawk) (left) holds the five-diamond wampum belt, and Dean Ottawa (Kitigan Zibi Algonquin) (right) holds the six-diamond wampum belt returned to Kanesatake. Photograph by Margaret M. Bruchac.

carried it across the U.S./Canadian border and home to Kanesatake, where it was reunited with the six-diamond wampum belt that left its side more than a century ago (Figure 10). These belts no longer reside in the boxes that NMAI curators kept them in for all those years. The two belts now rest nestled in a carved wooden box marked with the image of the Hiawatha wampum belt that represents the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The belts are periodically brought out into the community for cultural and political gatherings so they can fulfill their intended purpose, rather than live in isolation.

After resting at Onondaga for a time, while awaiting proper protocols, the Abenaki belt is tracking its way home as well. Chief Nelson has been entrusted with carrying it across the border to deliver to Chief Rick O'Bomsawin for safekeeping at Odanak. Several Abenaki communities recognize this belt, and negotiations are in progress to determine how best to welcome it back into Abenaki homelands.



## CONCLUSION

In sum, although both of the wampum belts advertised at Sotheby's were successfully reclaimed, this case study illustrates the pernicious influence of categorical and conceptual distinctions that continue to exert very real power over Indigenous patrimony. There is ample documentary and material evidence that non-Native agents—of museums, of the church, and of the state—actively sought to remove patrimonial wampum belts from tribal ownership. Whether they claimed to be doing so to protect these objects or to disempower tribal governance, the effect was the same. The capture and relocation of objects for museum collections fractured the living relations between those objects and the cultures that created them, and the subsequent refusal to engage with Indigenous claimants only widened the breach. Although numerous individuals—including even a few relatives of wampum keepers—have been documented as sellers of patrimonial wampum belts, there is no evidence that they were empowered by their tribal nations to do so. When chiefs and wampum keepers actively sought to reclaim improperly removed (or, more precisely, stolen) tribal patrimony, they were dismayed to learn that the exchange of money appeared to have altered conceptual rights and legal title. Even in cases where tribal rights were well-documented, private owners unashamedly asserted their claims of possession and rights of sale.

Indigenous title to cultural patrimony is not, *de facto*, eliminated by the removal of items from national custody, but it can easily be obscured by conceptual misrepresentations. One might assume that this problem could be addressed by human rights law, but there is no law that covers the misrepresentation (defamation?) of objects. Despite the goals stated in the United Nations Resolution on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, there are few legal mechanisms that enable the reclamation of Indigenous patrimony held by private collectors. This creates an ethically questionable distinction between museums (which, in the United States, are obligated to comply with NAGPRA) and private citizens. Then, there is the issue of borders: the NAGPRA and NMAIA legislation only apply within the territorial bounds of the United States. This affords sacred and patrimonial objects belonging to First Nations in Canada no protected status under NAGPRA, creating the (false) perception that Indigenous nations in Canada and America are irrevocably politically separate. NAGPRA protocols do not mandate consulting across national borders, but in the Sotheby's case, border crossing was crucial. These wampum belts required (even

demanded) a great deal of collaboration across borders: Native and non-Native; United States and Canada; Mohawk and Abenaki; and museum professionals and private collectors.

As this case so clearly demonstrates, objects that follow different paths can accrue differing perceptions of meaning and develop social lives of their own, regardless of their origins and identities (e.g., Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). The social lives of these wampum belts, as constructed and narrated by non-Native collectors and scholars, led to foreign places where their former lives—as animate beings and partners in diplomacy—were rendered almost invisible. The search for their origins revealed poignant stories of loss, as much as it pointed the way to recovery.

How, then, can we reconnect the ancestral objects held in private hands and art collections with their human relatives? Does the evidence of earlier lives disappear when objects are lost, broken, or cast in new performative roles? If we turn toward Indigenous ontologies (e.g., Hallowell 1960; Olsen 2010) we might recognize the possibility that Indigenous meanings can persist in the objects themselves, and can be reawakened when these objects are restored to their cultural context (e.g., Bohaker et al. 2015; Matthews 2016). Perhaps these wampum belts made themselves visible again, through the intentions originally woven into them. To understand how this might be possible, we could listen to 19th-century linguist Jean-André Cuoq at Kanesatake, who interpreted the Kanien:keha'ka word for wampum—*kahionni*—to mean both a literal and figurative river of woven words:

Let us return to *kahionni*: this object in the form of a band or ribbon, simulates a river, in the minds of the Sauvages; and this, they say, because of its elongated configuration and because of the wampum beads of which it is composed, represents the flows and the waves. And just as a navigable waterway facilitates the mutual meeting of nations, so the *kahionni*, the constructed river, is a sign of covenant, concord, and friendship; it serves to rally the divided minds among them, it is the featured union of hearts. (Cuoq 1877, 160)

When these wampum belts resurfaced, they created, in effect, a navigable path that diverse parties were compelled to follow to speak with one another, despite their differences. In the end, the desired recovery of these wampum belts did not come about through litigation or legislation; it happened through a single act of good faith, after years of very delicate and patient diplomacy.

Repatriation research and consultation, after all, is very much like the stages in a condolence ceremony, where healthy relations can only come about after the aggrieved parties first step out of the darkness (or

out of the thorny bushes, as the Haudenosaunee express it) to acknowledge the damage done (e.g., Hale 1895; Hill 2001). After eyes are opened, ears are unstopped, and throats are cleared, then the persons gathered can speak about the losses suffered, and think in a way that enables them to forge new relations. As the efforts of multiple institutions and Indigenous nations illustrate, repatriation efforts need not equate with the loss of knowledge. Restorative processes can improve our understandings of the past, and enable sleeping objects to speak once again with the communities that originated them. Restorative repatriation is best achieved if we patiently work together to repair broken chains of connection, one link at a time.

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