

# Akwesasne

## A Cultural Portrait



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A MOHAWK COUNCIL OF AKWESASNE COMMUNICATIONS UNIT PUBLICATION

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## Table of Contents

Ohen:ten Kariwatehkwen (Mohawk Version) .....	1
Ohen:ten Kariwatehkwen (English Version) .....	2-4
Welcome Letter from Tsi Snaihne District Chief Karen Loran.....	5
Foreword by Grand Chief Mike Kanentakeron Mitchell.....	6-7
Introduction.....	8
Akwesasne Mohawks.....	9-10
Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs .....	11
Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe.....	11
Mohawk Council of Akwesasne.....	12
Unity.....	12
The Longhouse.....	13
Ceremonies.....	14
Wampum.....	15
Clans.....	16
St. Regis Mohawk Church.....	17
Kateri Tekakwitha.....	17-18
Language.....	19-20
Oral Tradition.....	21
Medicines.....	22
Song and Dance.....	23
Water Drum and Rattle.....	24
Food .....	25-26
Ironworking.....	27
Moccasins.....	28
Carvings.....	28
Kastowa.....	29-30
Traditional Clothing.....	31-32
Jewelry.....	33
Pottery.....	34
Baskets .....	35
Cradle Boards.....	35
Contemporary Art.....	36
Canoe.....	37-38
Cornhusk Dolls.....	39-40
Lacrosse.....	41-44
Ahkwehsáhsne Cultural Restoration (ACR) Program.....	45
The Native North American Travelling College.....	46
Akwesasne Cultural Center.....	46
Tsiiionhiakwatha/Droulers Archaeological Site.....	47-48
Ionkwa'nikonri:io -Thompson Island Youth and Elders Camp.....	49
Entewatatha:wi Process- Nation Building at Akwesasne.....	50
Local Arts and Craft Events.....	51
Powwow Trail.....	51
Cultural Centers and Museums.....	51
Art Galleries.....	51
Artist Directory.....	52-56



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## Ohen:ten Kariwatehkwen (Mohawk Version)

Ta káti' wi' ó:nen sewatahonhsí:iohst tsi ó:nen entewarihwanhhotón:kon. wi' wáhe niohtónha'k onkwa'nikòn:ra.

Akwé:kon énska tsi tewarò:rok onkwa'nikòn:ra tánon teiethinonhwerá:ton ohneka'shòn:a tsi shé:kon ionkwatston'hákie. Ta tho wi' eh niohtónha'k onkwa'nikòn:ra.

Akwé:kon énska tsi tewarò:rok onkwa'nikòn:ra tánon teiethinonhwerá:ton iethni'nihsténha ohwéntsia tsi shé:kon iakotirihwahtenkié:ton. Ta tho wi' eh niohtónha'k onkwa'nikòn:ra.

Akwé:kon énska tsi tewarò:rok onkwa'nikòn:ra. Teiethinonhwerá:ton ohonte'shòn:a tsi shé:kon iotitirihwahtenkié:ton. Ta tho wi' wáhe niohtónha'k onkwa'nikòn:ra.

Akwé:kon énska tsi tewarò:rok onkwa'nikòn:ra tánon teiethinonhwerá:ton áhsen na'tekontahnón:tere (áhsen nikontenò:se) tsi shé:kon iotirihwahtenkié:ton. Ta tho wi' eh niohtónha'k onkwa'nikòn:ra.

Akwé:kon énska tsi tewarò:rok onkwa'nikòn:ra tánon teiethinonhwerá:ton niiohontéhsha' tsi shé:kon iotirihwahtenkié:ton. Ta tho wi' eh niohtónha'k onkwa'nikòn:ra.

Akwé:kon énska tsi tewarò:rok onkwa'nikòn:ra tánon teiethinonhwerá:ton ononhkwa'shon:a tsi shé:kon iotirihwahtenkié:ton. Ta tho wi' eh niohtónha'k onkwa'nikòn:ra.

Akwé:kon énska tsi tewarò:rok onkwa'nikòn:ra tánon teiethinonhwerá:ton oien'kwa'ón:we tsi shé:kon iotirihwahtenkié:ton. Ta tho wi' eh niohtónha'k onkwa'nikòn:ra.

Akwé:kon énska tsi tewarò:rok onkwa'nikòn:ra tánon teiethinonhwerá:ton okwire'shòn:a tsi shé:kon iotirihwahtenkié:ton. Ta tho wi' eh niohtónha'k onkwa'nikòn:ra.

Akwé:kon énska tsi tewarò:rok onkwa'nikòn:ra tánon teiethinonhwerá:ton kontírio tsi shé:kon iethí:kens. Ta tho

## Ohen:ten Kariwatehkwen (English Version)

*As is customary among our people, we begin each meeting or gathering with the Ohenten Kariwatekwen, or Thanksgiving Address. In this greeting, we acknowledge the contributions of all elements of creation and say thank you. At the end of each meeting we close with similar words.*

*The following version of the Thanksgiving Address was sent by the Mohawk Nation and the Haudenosaunee Grand Council via Chief Jake Swamp to the Fourth Russell Tribunal, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, November, 1980.*

### The People

We who have gathered together are responsible that our cycle continues. We have been given the duty to live in harmony with one another and other living things. We give greetings that our people still share the knowledge of our culture and ceremonies and are able to pass it on. We have our elders here and also the new faces yet to be born, which is the cycle of our families - for this we give thanks and greetings. Now our minds are one.

### The Earth

We give greetings and thanks to our Mother, the earth. She gives us that which makes us strong and healthy. We are grateful that she continues to perform her duties as she was instructed. The women and Mother Earth are our givers of life. We are her color, her flesh and her roots. Now our minds are one.

### The Plants

We greet and thank the medicine plants of the earth. They have been instructed by the Creator to cure our diseases and sicknesses. Our people will always know their native names. They come in many forms and have many duties. Through the ones who have been vested with knowledge of the medicine plants, we give thanks.

### The Trees

We acknowledge and give greetings to the trees of the

Now our minds are one. We give greetings and thanks to the plant life. Within the plants is the force of substance that sustains many life forms. From the time of the creation we have seen the various forms of plant life work many wonders. We hope that we will continue to see plant life for the generations to come. Now our minds are one. We give a greetings and thanks to the strawberry plants. We see them when the wind becomes warm again on the earth; the strawberries are indeed hanging there. And it is also true that we use them, that we drink the (straw)berry water. Now our minds are one.

### The Three Sisters

We have been given three main foods from the plant world. They are the corn, beans, and squash - the Three Sisters. For this we give thanks and greetings in the hope that they too will continue to replenish Mother Earth with the necessities of the life cycle. Now our minds are one.

### The Waters

We give thanks to the spirit of waters for our strength of well being. The waters of the world have provided many things. They quench our thirst, provide food for the plant life, and are the source of strength for the medicines we need. Now our minds are one.

### The Animals

We give thanks and greetings to the animal life. They are still living in the forests and other places. They provide us with food and this gives us peace of mind knowing that they are still carrying out their instructions as given by the Creator. We therefore give greetings and thanks to our animal brothers. Now our minds are one.

## **Ohen:ten Kariwatehkwen (English Version)**

world. They too continue to perform the instructions which they were given. The maple trees are the symbols as the head of the trees. It is the maple trees that provide us with sap for our syrup and is the first sign of the rebirth of spring. The trees provide us with shelter, shade, and fruits. Long ago our people were given a way of peace and strength and this way is symbolized by the everlasting tree of peace. Now our minds are one.

### **The Birds**

We now turn our thoughts toward the winged creatures. They have songs which they sing to help us appreciate our own purpose in life. We are reminded to enjoy our life cycle. Some of the winged creatures are available to us as food and they too are carrying out their responsibilities. To us the eagle is the symbol of strength. It is said that they fly the highest and can see the creation. We show our gratitude for the fulfillment of his duties. Now our minds are one.

### **The Four Winds**

We listen and hear the voices of the four winds. We are

assured that they are following the instructions of the Creator. They bring us strength. They come from the four directions. For this we give greetings and thanks. Now our minds are one.

### **The Thunderers**

To the Thunderers we call our Grandfathers we give greetings and thanks. You have also been given certain responsibilities by the Creator. We see you roaming the sky carrying with you water to renew life. Your loud voices are heard from time to time and for the protection and medicine you give, we offer our thanksgiving. Now our minds are one.

### **The Sun**

Our thoughts now turn to the sky. We see the sun, the source of life. We are instructed to call him our Eldest Brother. With the sun we can see the perfect gifts for which we are grateful. Our Brother sun nourishes Mother Earth and is the source of light and warmth. Our Brother is the source of all fires of life. With every new sunrise is a new miracle. Now our minds are one.

## **Ohen:ten Kariwatehkwen (English Version)**

### **The Moon**

During the night time we see the moon. We have been instructed to address her as our Grandmother. In her cycle she makes her face new in harmony with other female life. Our Grandmother Moon still follows the instructions of the Creator. Within these are the natural cycles of women. She determines the arrival of children, causes the tides of the oceans and she also helps us measure time. Our Grandmother continues to lead us. We are grateful and express our thanksgiving. Now our minds are one.

### **The Stars**

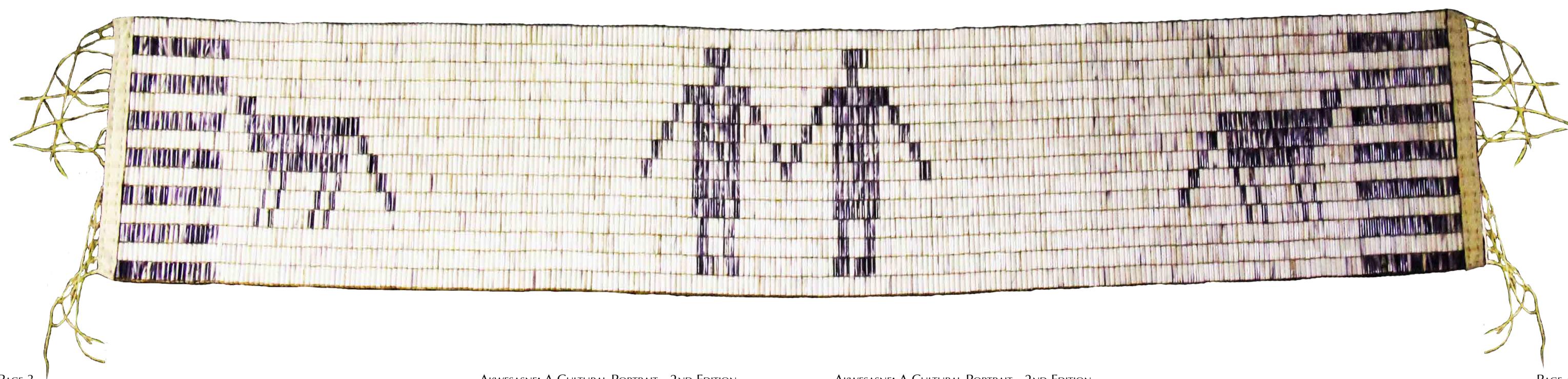
The Stars are the helpers of Grandmother Moon. They have spread themselves all across the sky. Our people knew their names and their messages of future happenings even to helping to mold individual character of mankind. The Stars provide us with guidance and they bring the dew to the plant life. As we view the beauty of the Stars we know that they too are following the instructions of the Creator. Now our minds are one.

### **The Four Beings**

The four powerful spirit beings who have been assigned by the Creator to guide us both by day and night are called the Sky Dwellers. Our Creator directed these helpers to assist him in dealing with us during our journey on Mother Earth. They know our every act and they guide us with the teachings that the Creator established. For the power of direction, we give greetings and thanks to the Sky Dwellers. Now our minds are one.

### **The Creator**

We now turn our thoughts to the Creator himself. We choose our finest words to give thanks and greetings to him. He has prepared all things on earth for our peace of mind. Then he said, "I will now prepare a place for myself where no one will know my face, but I will be listening and keeping watch on the people moving about the earth." And indeed, we see that all things are faithful to their duties as he instructed them. We will therefore gather our minds into one and give thanks to the Creator. Now our minds are as one.





Box 579, Cornwall, Ontario K6H 5T3

She:kon/Hello,

On behalf of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, I am proud to present *Akwesasne: A Cultural Portrait*. This publication is a tool that allows us to share our beautiful culture and traditions with guests to our community and our friends outside Akwesasne. Our culture is unique and can be appreciated by all. Our respect for Mother Earth, nature, and one another is instilled in us at a young age from elements of our traditions.

The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne has been working in partnership with the province of Quebec to advance the needs of our community. This publication is a joint venture with our Quebec friends who are interested in learning more about the Mohawk culture and way of life. We appreciate when our neighbors take the time to ask who we are. Ask, and you shall receive. I would like to take this opportunity to inform you on the initiatives between the MCA, the Conference regionale des elus Vallee-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent, the Secretariat for Aboriginal Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, Communication and Status of Women. These four organizations have worked together diligently to ensure that the Mohawk language, customs and culture are preserved and revitalized through a three-year cultural agreement. I would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their participation and contribution to this agreement: Chief William Sunday, Chief Joe Lazore, former-Chief Wesley Benedict, former-Chief Rachel Roundpoint, the MCA Quebec Liaison Victoria Irving and the Director of the Native North American Travelling College (NNATC) Russell Roundpoint.

*Akwesasne: A Cultural Portrait* is a wonderful snippet of Akwesasne culture. Although it is not all encompassing (that would be nearly impossible for one book), this publication serves to give visitors a sense of where we Akwesasnon come from and why some things are the way they are. Allow this portrait to introduce you to the arts and traditions of Mohawk people.

I hope you enjoy it.

Nia:wén/Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Loran".

Karen Loran  
District Chief of Tsi Snaihne

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Akwesasne - Land Where the Partridge Drums

## Foreword (By Grand Chief Mike Kanentakeron Mitchell)

### The Akwesasne Nation Community - Past and Present

Akwesasne today is a vibrant community of Mohawk families who live along the mainland and islands of the St. Lawrence River downstream from the Long Sault Rapids. Akwesasne Mohawks are recognized as a progressive people yet still maintaining the language, culture and traditions of our ancestors. Following European contact and subsequent wars among the European Nations, Akwesasne became a geographically divided territory. Today, the Mohawk territory is divided into two countries, and then divided again into two provinces, plus the State of New York, resulting in Akwesasne being referred to as a multi-jurisdictional territory.

Throughout history up to present time, we have been forced to defend our homeland against external governments who have threatened to expropriate our lands, extinguish inherent treaty and aboriginal rights, and impose their jurisdiction over our lands and people. The Mohawks of Akwesasne continue to respond with an active defense of our rights as the original inhabitants of Turtle Island. We are also strongly committed to ensuring that our collective history, language and traditions continue to be passed from one generation to the next. What we learn about our nation's culture and history helps us understand who we are and where we come from.

Akwesasne has meant many things to many people in its history. Historians have always had differing opinions when interpreting our history. We too have our own understanding and our interpretation that is supported by artifacts collected within our territory as well as oral history passed down by our elders. These sources tell us that the makeup of our population in Akwesasne was derived from various Haudenosaunee nations united at an ancient community and have reestablished themselves to our current homeland, Akwesasne. The Mohawks of Akwesasne are the descendants of the original inhabitants who were called "the St. Lawrence Valley Iroquoians". In generations past, the majority of these people were absorbed into the Mohawk and Onondaga nations and moved to Iroquois country in what is now known as Central New York. When the Mohawks moved back into the St. Lawrence River valley years later it was told that for many of the families adopted into the nation... it was like coming home.

Today, people may wonder "If the traditional clans of the Mohawks are Wolf, Bear and Turtle, then why are there so many other clans like the Snipe, Hawk, Eagle and Eel so prevalent in our community?" We explain that is because when Akwesasne was resettled in centuries past there were more than Mohawk Nation families who arrived here. There were also Oneida and Cayuga Nation families that travelled with them. Subsequently, a great number of Onondaga families relocated to Akwesasne from Oswegatchie. Other fleeing Nations, like the Abenaki from New England, also sought shelter in Akwesasne and were welcomed into the evolving nation.

The Mohawk language eventually became the dominant language of the Akwesasne community. The clans that exist here today reflect the myriad of various First Nations people who arrived here. In this sense these actions are not unfamiliar to Akwesasne as this has always been a practice of the Haudenosaunee as a way of keeping the Nation strong and healthy.

Akwesasne has enjoyed centuries of peaceful coexistence beside its neighbors who represent the English, French, Scottish and American families. They reside on the Quebec, Ontario and New York State borders alongside the

## Foreword (con't)

territory of Akwesasne. Today, Akwesasne Mohawks enjoy sharing much of their culture and traditions with our Canadian and American neighbors by inviting them to our annual Akwesasne International Pow Wow, and visiting the cultural centers of Akwesasne, including the Akwesasne Cultural Center on U.S. Rt. 37 and the Native North American Travelling College on Cornwall Island, Ontario. Also, the Thompson Island Cultural Camp on the St. Lawrence River, as well as joint projects with Quebec, such as the Droulers- Tsionhiakwatha Indian Village site near Saint Anicet, Quebec.

In closing, we would like to extend our best wishes to all our Quebec neighbors with whom we have rekindled a peaceful relationship. We recognize that our two cultures can co-exist by the sharing of our unique traditions that define the best of who we are.



## Introduction

For centuries, Mohawks have inhabited the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River regions forming a strong understanding of the land's resources. Although traditions and ways of life have evolved over time, Akwesasne remains strongly connected to the roots of Mohawk and Haudenosaunee culture. Elements of this culture can be found throughout the community in nearly all aspects of life such as food, dialect and language, artwork, hobbies, ceremonies, family life, and so on.

Akwesasne is committed to ensuring the traditions of their ancestors continue to be passed down to future generations. Modern technology, European influence, and changes in the environment have had some negative impacts on the preservation of culture and language in Akwesasne, but great effort has been put forth in recent years to reverse any culture loss. Classes on elements of Mohawk culture such as moccasin making, beading, cooking, dancing, basket and rattle-making are regularly held at places like the Akwesasne Cultural Center and Native North American Travelling College. Mohawk language immersion is offered at two schools in Akwesasne and resources such as the Akwesasne Economic Development Agency's Can 8 language learning software are all contributing to an increase in Mohawk fluency.

This movement of re-educating community members about their history and traditions has led to a new wave of youth taking pride in all areas of being Mohawk.

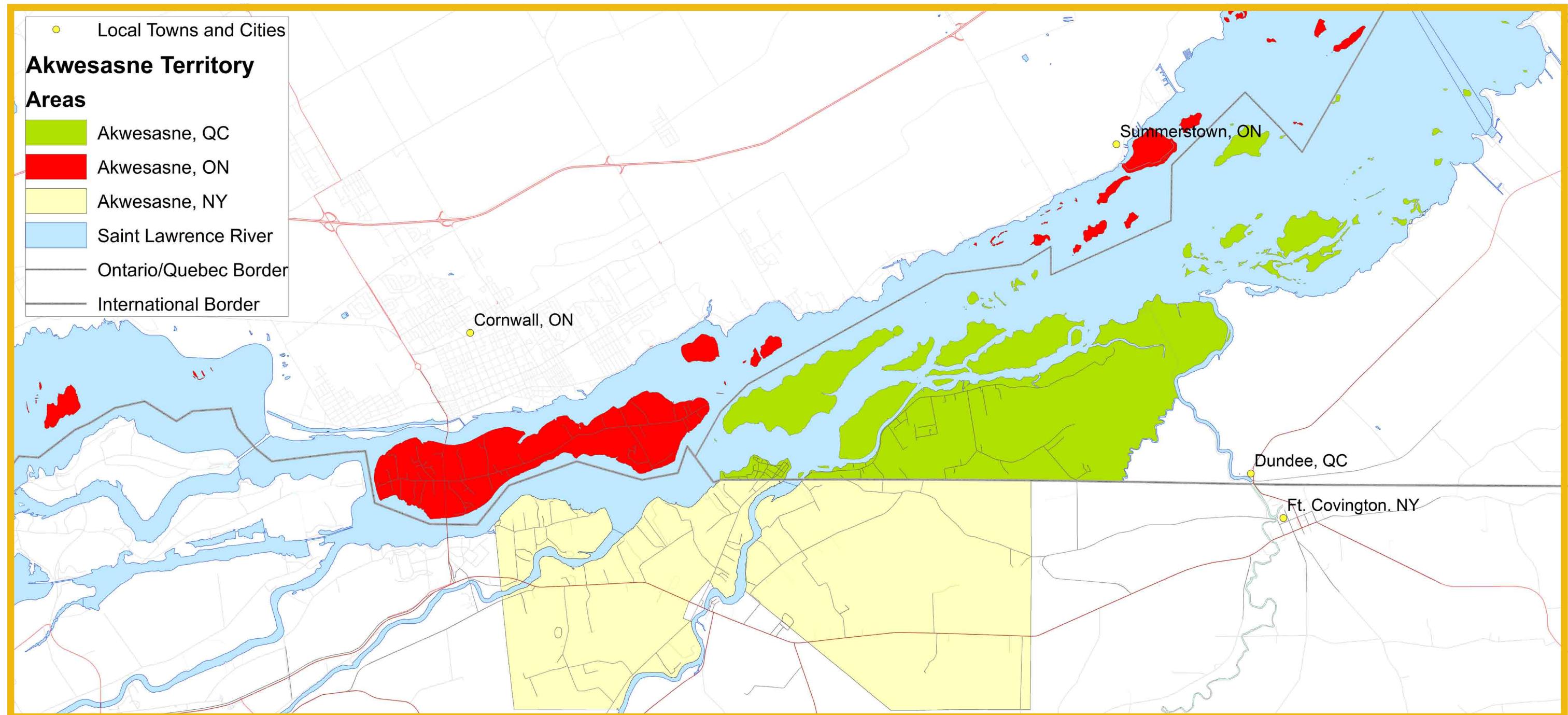


## Akwasasne Mohawks

Akwasasne today is a picturesque community located on the grand St. Lawrence River. The Raquette River and St. Regis River also wind through the territory, making it easy to understand why the community's earliest ancestors made their home here. The waterways provided not only transportation and trading routes, but also an abundance of wildlife to fish and hunt. Many sprawling and scenic islands in the region are also part of Akwesasne territory and the Mohawks settled along these very same banks thousands of years ago, long before European contact.

The Mohawk people settled not only at Akwesasne, but also all along the St. Lawrence River Valley. Today, Akwesasne is the largest of several communities of Kanienkehaka/Mohawks. The others are: Kahnawake, Kanesatake, Tyendinaga, Ganienkeh, Kanatsiohareke, Ohsweken, and Wahtha.

Long after Akwesasne was re-settled permanently, the international border between Canada and the U.S. was drawn through the community, creating northern and southern "portions", along with Quebec, Ontario and New York sections.



A map illustrates the unique location of Akwesasne and the international and provincial/state borders that divide it today.

## Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs

The Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs is the traditional government situated at Akwesasne, which utilizes its chiefs, clanmothers, faithkeepers and people to provide for the well being of the Mohawk Nation and to sit with the other Haudenosaunee nations on matters of national and international importance.

In 1888, Akwesasne was bestowed with the special responsibility and honor as the site of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy-sanctioned “Fire,” or seat of the Mohawk Nation. The Haudenosaunee, or “People of the Longhouse,” (also known as the Iroquois) are a confederacy of six nations who joined together to form a peaceful alliance under the democratic constitution known as the “Kaianerakowa” or Great Law of Peace. The members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy include the Seneca, Cayuga, Tuscarora, Onondaga, Oneida and Mohawk Nations.

The Mohawks are called “Kanienkehaka” or People of the Flint and they are considered the “Eastern Door Keepers,” because they made their villages and homes in the eastern portion of the Haudenosaunee’s ancestral territory. The Mohawks are the guardians and protectors of the eastern Haudenosaunee territory. Akwesasne is known as “The Land Where the Partridge Drums.”



Representing the traditional council, a group of Haudenosaunee leaders marched in 2013 in defense of their inherent aboriginal rights.

## Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (SRMT) is the elected system of governance for the southern portion of Akwesasne. The United States Bureau of Indian Affairs recognizes the SRMT as an official governing body in Akwesasne, responsible for what is considered the “U.S.” portion of the territory.

The SRMT elects a 6-person tribal council made up



SRMT is the elected government of the southern portion of Akwesasne. Image courtesy of the SRMT.

of three chiefs and three sub-chiefs. The SRMT holds staggered elections: one chief and one sub-chief is elected every year to a three-year term.

## Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne (MCA) is the elected leadership system responsible for governance in the northern portion of Akwesasne. MCA replaced the “St. Regis Band Council” that was put into effect in the early 1900s. The Band Council operated under Canada’s Indian Act and much of the authority was conveyed through the Department of Indian Affairs, now Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, with the final authority being Canada’s Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.



The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne (pictured in 2012) is the elected government of the northern portion of Akwesasne.

Since 1998, MCA has been actively engaged in discussions with Canada to have certain sections of the Indian Act replaced by Akwesasne’s own laws and regulations.

Today, chiefs are elected to Mohawk Council every three years. Twelve district chiefs (four for each of the northern portion’s three districts) and one grand chief are elected to three-year terms.

## Unity

Despite differing political beliefs, the Mohawk people share one unique culture that is decorated with vibrancy, grace and beauty. Political and historical differences are far-removed from day-to-day culture and Mohawk life in the 21st Century. From the colors of their traditional clothing to the fine skills of beadworkers and basketmakers, and from the carefully woven lacrosse sticks to the drumbeat that leads song and dance, the Mohawk culture is simply stunning.

## The Longhouse

Haudenosaunee lived in longhouses up until the late 1800s. A longhouse is a long and narrow bark covered house. Panels of elm bark were lashed to wooden poles usually made from hickory, cedar, or elm. Senecas at Allegheny were the last to reside in a longhouse. Mohawks began to change the roofs of longhouses soon after contact with the Dutch in the 1600's and mainly built houses in the European style by the 1700's.

Longhouses did not have windows. There were two doors on each end. Hearths or fire pits were in the center of the longhouse and the families could cook on them as well as use them for warmth. There were smoke holes in the ceiling that allowed the smoke to exit the longhouse. The sides of the longhouse were considered the living areas for the families. There was a platform up off the ground that was used as a bed and sitting area. Woven mats would be laid down on the platform and were slept on. Furs were used for warmth. Underneath the platform was a storage area where dried foods and tools were kept. An upper platform would also be used for storage or as beds if a family had many children.

Historically, each village belonged to a clan. All the women and children living in a longhouse belonged to the same clan. The husbands and fathers were from a different village and clan. As families grew compartments were added to the longhouse. Over time some longhouses grew to be 200 feet long.

Today, a longhouse is a long building made out of logs. Traditional ceremonies, socials, and community meetings are held in the modern longhouse. The longhouse is also known to be a metaphor for the territory of the Six Nations Confederacy. Mohawks are the eastern door, Senecas the western door, and Onondaga the firekeepers of the house.



A 20th century longhouse in Akwesasne is used for ceremonies, meetings and other gatherings. The inside features one large room with wood stoves on both ends and bench seating along all four walls.

## Ceremonies

Historically, the Haudenosaunee have held and participated in a number of spiritual ceremonies that are a core component of the culture and this continues today. The ceremonies that are held and the "rules" that are followed have been passed down from generation to generation since the beginning of Haudenosaunee existence. Each ceremony serves a very distinct purpose and that remains true today.

Today, traditional Mohawks continue to take part in ceremonies held at a formal longhouse. While longhouses were historically the traditional Mohawk dwelling, today they are used for cultural and ceremonial purposes that bring together many members of the community. These purposes include ceremonies, social dances, funerals, weddings, fundraisers, and meetings.

Ceremonies held routinely at the longhouse are in connection to the seasons and Mother Earth.



Tobacco burning is illustrated in a painting by John Thomas.

Most of the ceremonies mark certain events in nature. The Strawberry Ceremony, for example, is held at the start of the strawberry season and is meant to show appreciation for the food the strawberry and other berries bring. Similarly, the Wahta, or Maple Ceremony, is held to give thanks to the trees for the sap they provide and to ask that the gatherers are kept safe as well.

Some ceremonies take place outside of the longhouse. Tobacco burning ceremonies, for example, can be held almost anywhere and for a number of purposes. Smudging is another common ceremony that Mohawks participate in. Sweetgrass or sage is burned and the smoke is waved over a person or room (usually with an eagle's feather) to remove anything negative. Many Mohawks simply smudge their homes or bodies at the start of every day.

**Some formal ceremonies traditionally held by Haudenosaunee communities include:**

Mid-Winter Ceremony – Held during winter following the first New Moon, this ceremony is several days long with each day having a distinct purpose. The first day, "Stirring of the Ashes" symbolizes renewal and the start of seasons. New babies can also receive their names during Mid-Winter.

Wahta – Maple Tree Ceremony – Held at the start of the maple/sap season

Ratiwe:ras – Thunder Dance Ceremony – Held after the first thundering in spring

Ka:nen – Seed Ceremony – Held at the start of the planting season

Ken'niiohontésha – Strawberry Ceremony – Held when the first strawberry bud is observed

Skanekwenhtará:ne – Raspberry Ceremony

Orhóntseri – Green Bean Ceremony

Okahseró:ta - Green Corn Ceremony

Kaienthó:kwen Enhontekhwaro:roke – Harvest Ceremony – Held on the 1st Day of Harvest

Ontkenhnhkoten – End of Seasons Ceremony – Formally "ends" the year to start again with Mid-Winter

## Wampum

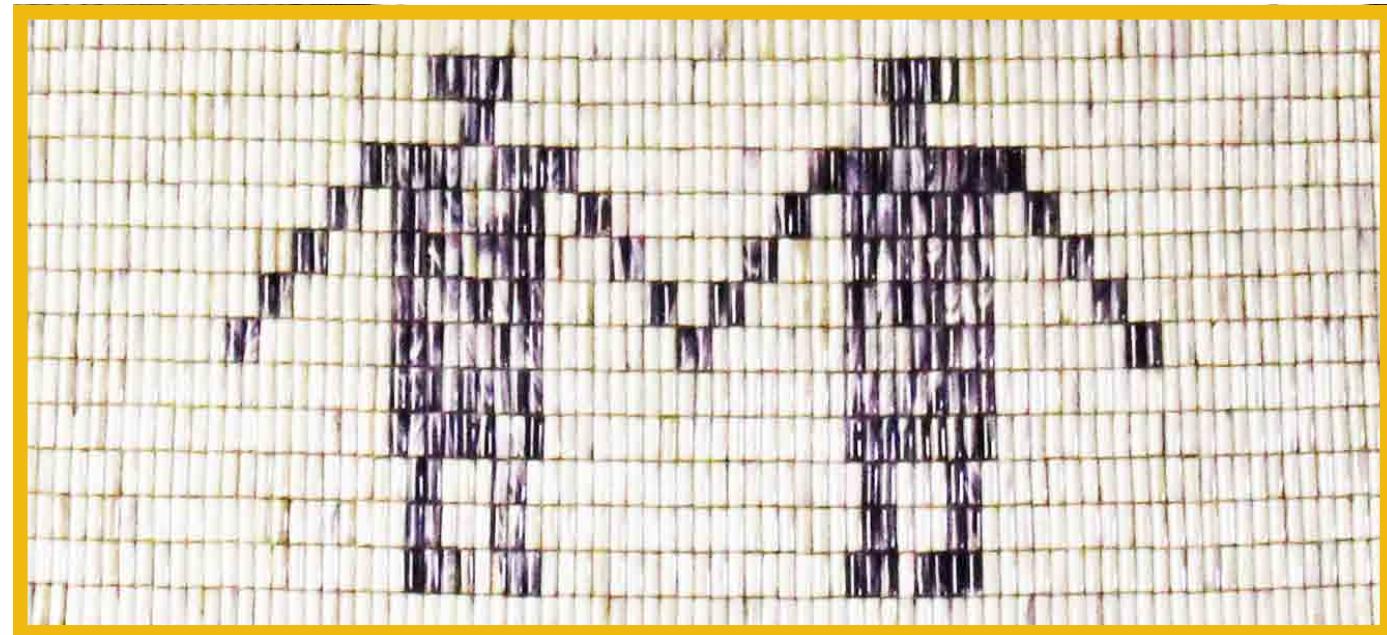
For thousands of years, the Haudenosaunee have been using and trading a special shell bead called wampum. Wampum beads are drilled from specific types of hard clam and large snail shells native to the Eastern coastline. Two colors of beads can be drilled from the shells: Purple and white.

The Haudenosaunee have treated wampum beads with very high or sacred regard throughout history, using them in ceremonies and for other important purposes. Wampum beads, because of their shape and contrasting colors, were used to make wampum belts that carried specific messages. Many wampum belts signify important treaties and events in history.

Two wampum belts have exceptional significance to Akwesasne: The Two Row Wampum and the “Akwesasne Wolf Belt.”

The Two Row Wampum belt, called Kaswenthá, is made from white wampum beads with two rows of purple wampum beads down the center. The parallel purple rows are said to symbolize the Haudenosaunee people and the European settlers travelling the “River of Life” in separate, parallel vessels. The Haudenosaunee are in their canoes. This symbolizes their culture, laws, traditions, customs and ways of life. The non-Haudenosaunee are said to be in their ship, which symbolizes everything that they carry in their culture, laws, traditions, customs and life-ways. It is said that the belt represents mutual respect of one another’s voyage and that they would travel the River of Life side-by-side, not interfering with or impeding one another.

The second belt, commonly known as the Akwesasne Wolf Belt (full image on Page 3), has been subject to various historical interpretations, but is no doubt a valuable piece of Akwesasne history. The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne uses the belt’s symbolism for official purposes. The 250-year-old belt was repatriated and returned to Akwesasne in 2010 by the State Museum of New York. It can now be viewed at the Akwesasne Cultural Centre.



A section of the Akwesasne Wolf Belt illustrates how purple and white wampum beads have been used to create meaningful messages.

## Clans

All Haudenosaunee have traditionally been part of clans which still exist. Historically, clans were like extended families and all members of a certain clan lived in the same longhouse. Clan names were taken from animals, birds or fish. Today, Mohawks continue to recognize the clan they belong to. Clans are passed down to children from their mother, as Mohawks have a matrilineal society.

**Mohawk people have three principle clans:** the Turtle Clan, the Bear Clan and the Wolf Clan. Over time, other clans made their way to Akwesasne from other territories and so today the clans include Snipe, Deer, Eel, Beaver, Heron, and Hawk.

The laws of the clans are very simple and rigidly adhered to. Since everyone in a clan is part of a large extended family, it is forbidden for a man and woman of the same clan to marry. This rule continues to exist today, but is mainly recognized by traditional Mohawks.

### Clans in Akwesasne today:



Bear Clan



Wolf Clan



Turtle Clan



Hawk Clan



Eel Clan



Beaver Clan



Heron Clan



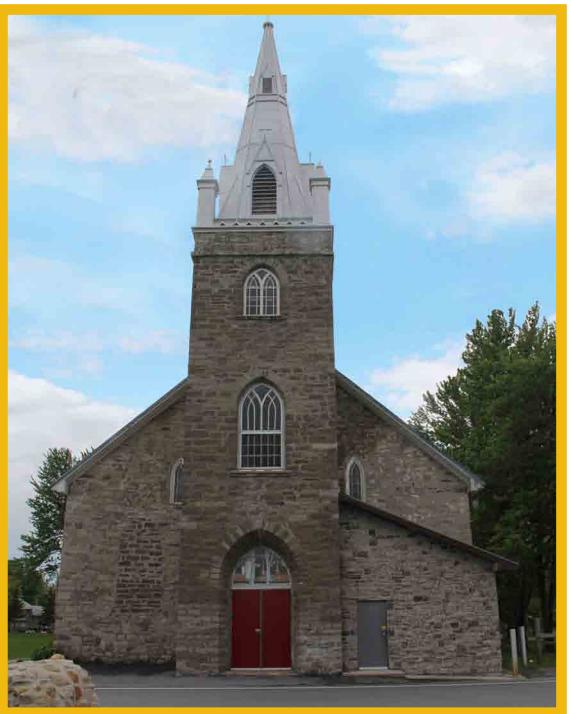
Snipe Clan



Deer Clan

## St. Regis Catholic Church Mission

In 1755, the St. Regis Catholic Church Mission was established by French Catholic priests in the Kana:takon district of Akwesasne, at one of the territory's most pristine locations where the St. Lawrence River and St. Regis River meet.. The beautiful stone building currently in use was built in 1795. It is one of the oldest buildings in the North Country, and served for many years as a landmark for sailors and fishermen on the St. Lawrence, for it meant the approach of the Long Sault Rapids. Today, the church continues to serve the people of Akwesasne and masses, wakes and funerals are still occasionally practiced in the Mohawk language. The choir sings modern hymns and Gregorian chants translated into Mohawk. Inside, the building is adorned with Mohawk iconography, including pillars carved with the bear, wolf and turtle, which are symbols of the primary Mohawk clans. Today, both Christian faith and Mohawk traditions continue to be represented and interlaced within the St. Regis Catholic Church.



The St. Regis Catholic Church Mission was built in 1795

## Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680)

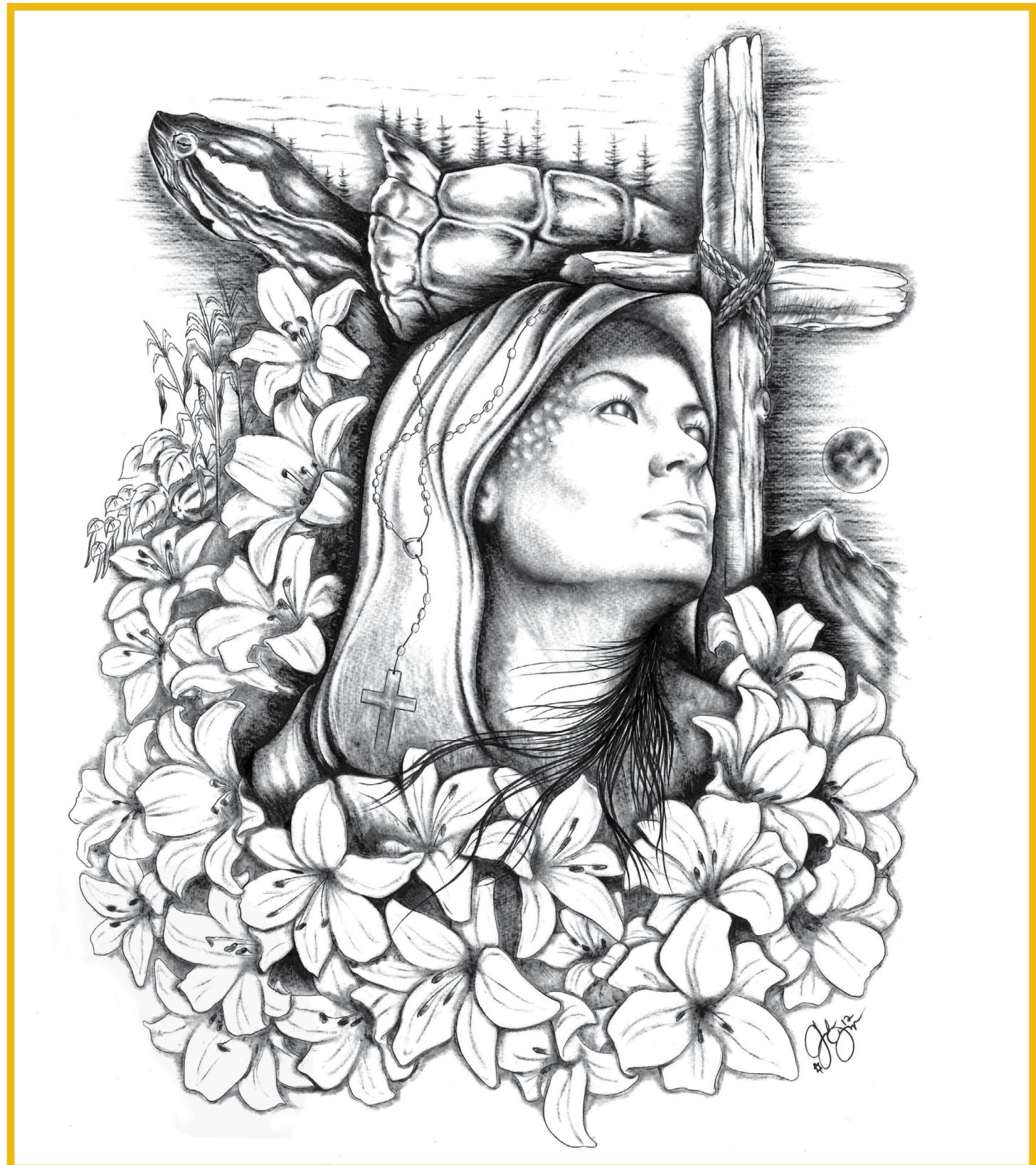
Kateri Tekakwitha, known as "Lily of the Mohawks," was born in 1656 to an Algonquin mother and a Mohawk father in the Mohawk Valley.

Kateri's father was a traditional Mohawk Chief of the Mohawk Nation and her mother, a practicing Christian. When Kateri was only four years old, she lost both of her parents to smallpox and was raised by her uncle who would later become a traditional Turtle Clan Chief. Kateri also suffered from smallpox, which left her with poor eyesight and a badly scarred face.

When Kateri was ten years old, French soldiers invaded Mohawk country. French missionaries soon came to Kateri's village and devoted a lot of time to her. In 1675, she decided she wanted to be baptized and on Easter Sunday, April 18, 1676, that ceremony took place. Later that year, Kateri travelled to "Caughnawaga," presently known as Kahnawake (near Montreal, Quebec), and continued to learn about Christianity. Two years later, Kateri took her own personal vows to serve Christ.

Early in 1680, Kateri became seriously ill. When she was just 24 years old, Kateri passed away. Those at her bedside stated they witnessed a miracle, for the scars and marks on her face disappeared.

Today, many Mohawks, Akwesasronon included, travel to the National Shrine of Blessed Tekakwitha located in Fonda, NY and the St. Francis Xavier Church in Kahnawake where her "relics" are preserved. For many years, there was a campaign to have Kateri Tekakwitha declared into Sainthood. Pope Benedict XVI declared Kateri a Saint on October 21, 2012 in Rome, Italy. Many Mohawks from Akwesasne and Kahnawake made the journey to see the Canonization.



For the Canonization in Rome, Italy, this official portrait of Kateri Tekakwitha was created by Akwesasne resident Jordan Thompson. (Image provided by Mohawk Art & Design - Jordan Thompson, © 2012)

## Language

In Akwesasne there are 12 letters in the Mohawk alphabet. Other Mohawk communities may differ as some use the letter Y. Akwesasne's alphabet consists of the letters: A E H I K N O R S T W ' . The glottal stop that resembles an apostrophe is considered a letter in the Mohawk alphabet. Vowels are A E I O EN and ON.

Many Mohawk words are phrases within words. For example, "iakoia'takarenie's" is the Mohawk word for school bus. "Iako" means "she" or "them", "ia'ta" (ia:ta) means "body", and "karenies" means "transports". So loosely translated iakoia'takarenie's means an item that transports bodies (people). Mohawk words are mainly verb based action words and are very descriptive. For example, one cannot say the word "cook" without knowing who is performing the action of cooking and when it is taking place. To illustrate, "iakokhon:ni" means "she is cooking," "wa'ekhon:ni" means "she did cook," and "eniekhon:ni" means "she will cook." Most Mohawk words are similar in this sense.

Language loss has been an issue of concern for many tribes and First Nations communities, Akwesasne included. European settlement and the spread of Christianity in North America lead to extreme language loss among the continent's first inhabitants. Young Mohawks were punished at school for speaking a language foreign to their teachers, often nuns, in the early 1900s. The result has been cultural genocide. It is unknown exactly how many Mohawk language speakers are left today, but fluency decreased significantly by the mid-1900s. Great steps have been taken in recent decades to restore language and there is success, with the number of fluent speakers now steadily growing. The Ahkwesáhsne\* Mohawk Board of Education offers an immersion school called Skahwatsi:ra mean-



The Akwesasne Economic Development Agency (AEDA) is the first aboriginal multi-media language center in Ontario. Their program's intention is to preserve, protect and revitalize the local dialect of the Mohawk Language.

\*Two spellings for Akwesasne/Ahkwasahsne are used throughout the community.

ing "One family" or "One nation." The Akwesasne Economic Development Agency holds an aboriginal multi-media language center-the first of its kind in Ontario- that provides an effective, timely and economical solution towards preserving, protecting and revitalizing the local dialect of the Mohawk Language. Their program incorporates traditional language with modern computer technology. As well, the Akwesasne Freedom School - a private school started by community members in 1979 - is also a full Mohawk immersion school with a day-care language nest and grades Pre-K through Grade 9.

Kanien'kéha Alphabet						
	a	e	i	o	en	on
h	ha	he	hi	ho	hen	hon
k	ka	ke	ki	ko	ken	kon
n	na	ne	ni	no	nen	non
r	ra	re	ri	ro	ren	ron
s	sa	se	si	so	sen	son
t	ta	te	ti	to	ten	ton
w	wa	we	wi			wen



Akwesasne derives its name from the Mohawk word "Ohkwe:sen" meaning "partridge." Over time, Akwesasne became known as "Land Where the Partridge Drums."

## Oral Tradition

The preservation of culture, language and history rested with elders in the community. Youth learned their culture, language and history through elders likely to be their grandparents, aunts and uncles. The elders would tell stories of when they were young and retell stories told to them by their grandparents.

Speaking with youth was an opportunity to enrich the culture by teaching ceremonial speeches, songs, and ceremonies. A Mohawk person raised with longhouse tradition would have many opportunities to recite speeches of thanksgiving. Through recital the youth naturally progressed their public speaking skills and improved accuracy over time. Chiefs must be able to recite the ceremonial speeches passed down throughout the generations.



Mohawks have preserved their culture, traditions and history over time by using oral tradition to pass information on generation to generation (Image by Myron Zabol).

## Medicines



Traditional medicines have been used to aid a variety of different ailments. (Image provided by Waylon Cook).

First Nations communities have historically had an advanced understanding of plants and medicine. This allowed them to be highly skilled in treating wounds, fractures, fevers and childbirth problems. The Haudenosaunee developed a cure for scurvy, treated hypertension, head lice and even designed sauna baths.

The majority of the medicine that was collected came from plant sources that were gathered from the forests, lakes and rivers surrounding the communities. Each season would bring certain plants that could be stored for the year, and were used for ceremonies and community gatherings. Treatments for wounds, sore throat infection and other sicknesses were produced and prescribed by people in the community who had a very special knowledge about their effects and how to use them.

## Song and Dance

Singing and dancing are a major component of Haudenosaunee culture. Mohawk or Haudenosaunee songs are usually led by a singer using either a water drumbeat or rattle. For ceremonies, the men of the longhouse are in charge of singing and drumming, while both men and women take part in the dancing that accompanies each song. Social songs, on the other hand, can be sung anywhere and the Haudenosaunee have many songs that have been passed down from one generation to the next.

The dancing that accompanies both ceremonial and social songs have different steps and rules to follow. The Round Dance, one of the Haudenosaunee's most well known dances, features a group of any size dancing with a side-step while holding hands with one another in man/woman/man/woman order. As more and more

people join the dance, the circle becomes larger and larger and sometimes must become two or more circles inside one another. The dance also changes direction from clockwise to counter-clockwise throughout the duration, symbolizing first all things positive in life, then all things negative.

Powwows, though not a part of traditional Haudenosaunee culture, bring together First Nations people to demonstrate dancing skills, traditional clothing, and to celebrate culture. The type of dances performed varies from powwow to powwow, usually representing the host community's culture. Akwesasne's powwow includes traditional dancing, smoke dancing, jingle dress dancing, shawl dancing and others.

In recent years, Akwesasne youth have shown an interest in the western Hoop Dance. This beautiful and aesthetically graceful dance is challenging to master but breathtaking to observe.



*Smoke dancers at the Akwesasne International Powwow. (Image used with permission from the Akwesasne International Powwow Committee).*

## Water Drum and Rattle

The water drum and cow horn rattle are traditional musical instruments for the Haudenosaunee. Cow horn rattles are used to produce the rhythm for song and dance. They are hit against the thigh, the palm of the hand or are shaken. Rattles made of cow horn were not made until after European contact. Prior to the introduction of cows, rattle materials were limited to bark, gourd and turtle shells or buffalo horns. The buffalo horn was replaced by the cow horn. The inside of the rattle was shaved thin and dried corn, small stones, cherry pits or small metal balls were inserted to create sound.

Water drums are often used with the cow horn rattle to produce the rhythms for dance and song. The base is typically made out of hickory, cedar, hard maple or basswood. Water is placed inside the drum and great care must be taken to ensure the longevity of the drum. The drum is tipped regularly to moisten the skin and maintain its tightness and proper tone. The water drum sounds different from any other kind of drum. It is used for both ceremonial and social songs.



*A water drum and cow horn rattle used by Mohawks. (Image provided by Joe Francis).*

## Food

The Mohawks have always lived closely to Mother Earth. Long ago the Mohawks were hunters, gatherers, trappers, fishermen and farmers. The Mohawk people have always known that they are to only take what they need from Mother Earth including plants and wildlife. They were very cautious not to deplete all of their resources to ensure that there would be enough to sustain every person in their community as well as their future generations not yet born.

Mohawk men hunted and trapped for deer, bear, turkey, rabbit and other wild game found within the areas of their territory. Everyone would benefit from the hunt and no part of the animal would ever go to waste. The Mohawks were also fishermen. There was an abundance of fish such as salmon, trout, bass, perch, eel and whitefish. Mohawks would hunt and fish during all the seasons.

Mohawk women were the primary gatherers. They searched the fields and forests for tuber, wild onions, dandelions, leeks, milkweed, medicines, wild greens, nuts, mushrooms and maple syrup. They would also collect a variety of berries in the summertime beginning with the strawberry.

Mohawks were very advanced farmers and had supreme agricultural achievements. Their plant breeding methods were among the most advanced in the world. At times, there were over 80 varieties of corn cultivated. The



Traditionally, Mohawk women were the primary gatherers.

major successes in agriculture were corn, beans, and squash. Together these were known as the Three Sisters. When eaten together the Three Sisters provided many essential vitamins and nutrients necessary to maintain a healthy body. The Three Sisters were planted in mounds together. Cornstalks provided support for the climbing bean vines and the squash leaves provided shade that kept the soil moist and reduced the amount of weeds surrounding the crops. Mohawk women were in charge of the gardens and the Mohawk men helped clear the fields, worked the soil with their hands and watered the crops. During the fall season the crops would be harvested and stored for the winter months.

Today, Mohawks mainly eat a Western diet and shop in supermarkets. However, many of their traditional foods survived and are eaten today, especially during celebrations and ceremonies. Corn soup and strawberry drink are examples of traditional foods still being prepared. Despite modern conveniences, many Mohawks continue to plant their own gardens and hunt for wildlife such as deer and fish.

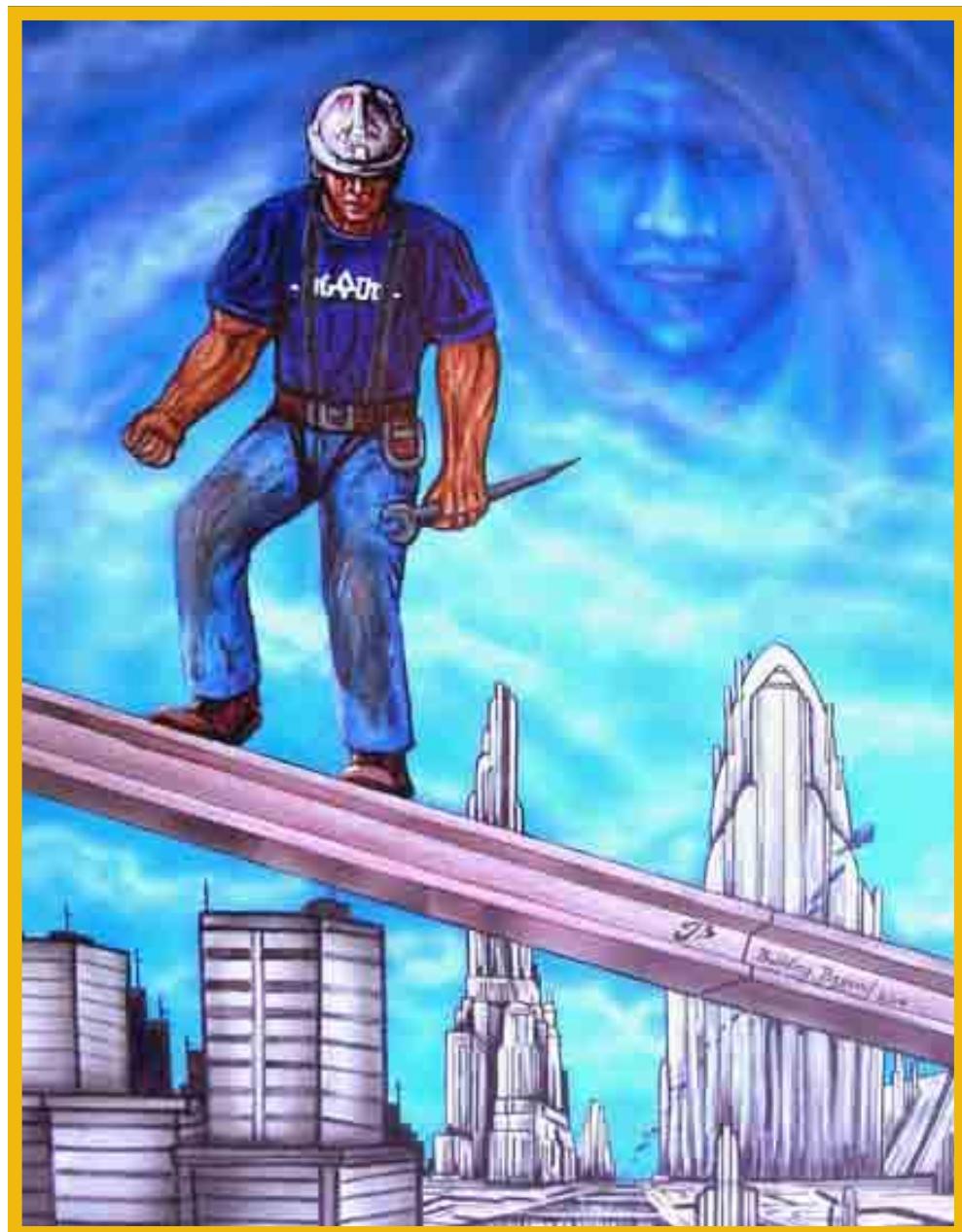


Three Sisters: Corn, beans and squash.(Painting by Mark Light).

## Ironworking

Ironworking has been a very proud tradition of Mohawk people. Akwesasne is among the Mohawk communities that have been home to the most skilled and fearless ironworkers in North America. In fact, people that have worked with Mohawk men ironworking say they have immunity to heights.

Mohawk men began “walking iron” in the late 1800s when they were hired to work on a bridge being built over the St. Lawrence River. Upon completion of the bridge, many men began migrating towards urban cities in search of that type of work. In the early 1900’s, many found their way to New York City.



A painting by Joe Barnes illustrates the importance of ironworking to Mohawk people.

Over the next hundred years, many Mohawk and Haudenosaunee men worked on the majority of New York’s major construction projects. Today, many Mohawk men continue to work on high steel, carrying on the skill with bravery, strength and pride.

Ironwork is very dangerous and ironworkers typically work with a partner. These partners have a mutual respect and trust which is essential while working in such a hazardous occupation. Oftentimes, the partner may be a brother or relative.

When the tragic terrorist acts were perpetrated against New York City in 2001, Akwesasne ironworkers were among the first on the scene to assist in the rescue and recovery at Ground Zero.

Today, many Mohawk men continue to travel to cities for ironwork all week, returning to Akwesasne and their families on weekends. This is the life of an ironworker.

## Moccasins

Traditional Mohawk footwear is called a moccasin. Men, women and children would wear the same style moccasin. The moccasin is made from strong leather such as deer or elk. The hides are tanned and stretched into soft leather before becoming moccasins. The traditional moccasin is a short moccasin with a folded down cuff and soft soles.

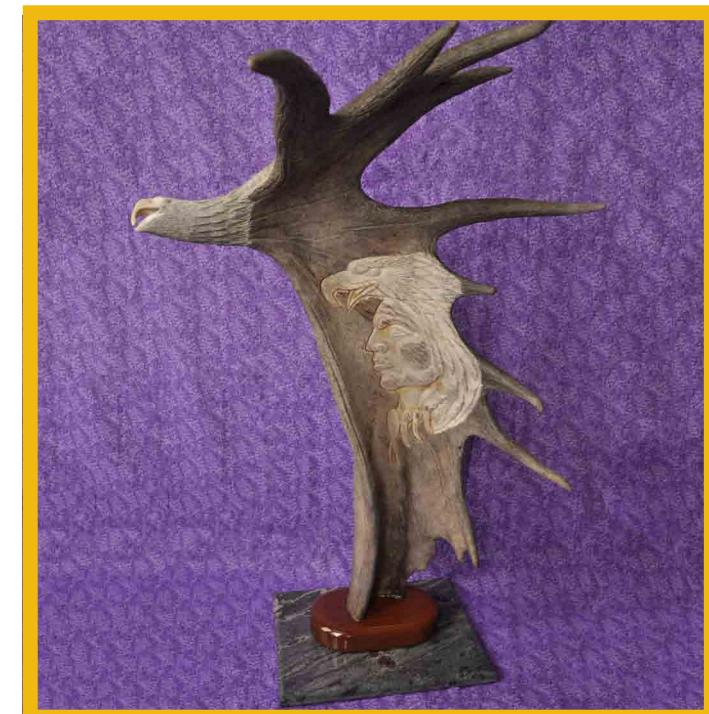
The front top of the moccasin is called a vamp and is typically decorated with beadwork and/or porcupine quills. Usually the beadwork is done on a more sturdy material like velvet and then sewn onto the moccasin. This is easier, but also allows for the beadwork to be salvaged when the moccasin is worn out.

Haudenosaunee runners could travel over 100 miles in 24 hours.

Message runners would carry about 6 pairs of moccasins with them, since they would get so much wear and tear.

## Carvings

The use of carved bones and antlers is one of the oldest traditions of the Haudenosaunee. Antlers were used to create fishhooks, needles, spoons, pressure flakes and beautiful combs and beads for necklaces. The combs are notable for the graceful and intricate carvings of animal and human shapes.



A carved antler made by Mohawk artisan Joe Francis



An example of traditional moccasins made by Bill Loran .

Mohawk carvings on the antlers of moose were extremely rare and special as moose lose their antlers only once each year. The carvings were long, thin, and often represented the spirits of the woodlands. When polished, the antlers were glossy white and almost had an ivory-type look in appearance.

In modern times, these everyday items were replaced by modern day trade goods. Haudenosaunee artists are once again producing antler and bone carvings, making items such as pendants, combs, key chains and figures of animals.

Oftentimes, subject matter of larger pieces of sculpture frequently involves themes that reveal the closeness of the Haudenosaunee to nature. The natural shape and texture of the antlers are incorporated into the sculptured form.

## Kastowa

A kastowa is a traditional headdress worn by Haudenosaunee men during ceremonies. The kastowa is a fitted feathered hat. Typically the open dome frame is made of strips of wood, namely ash basket splints, because of its pliability. Sockets are put into place to uphold the feathers. The feathers can also be removed for storage. The frame can be covered with velvet, tanned animal skin, a variety of other fabrics, or left bare. Feathers also cover the frame. A kastowa can be adorned with eagle, hawk, turkey, or pheasant feathers. The band may also have silver brooches on it and may also have glass beadwork.

The position of the feathers identifies the man's individual nation. Each of the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy has a difference in the placement of feathers to signify which nation they belong to. Tuscarora kastowas have no eagle feathers on top. A Seneca kastowa has one feather and it stands straight up. Cayugas have one feather and that feather is tilted off to the side at a forty-five degree angle. Onondaga kastowas have one feather that stands straight up and one that hangs down. Oneida kastowas have three feathers on top, two are up and one is down. The Mohawk kastowa has three feathers standing straight up on top.



A display at the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne depicts kastowas of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.



A Mohawk kastowa features three feathers standing straight up on top (Image courtesy of the Akwesasne International Powwow Committee).  
(Kastowa by John White)

## Traditional Clothing

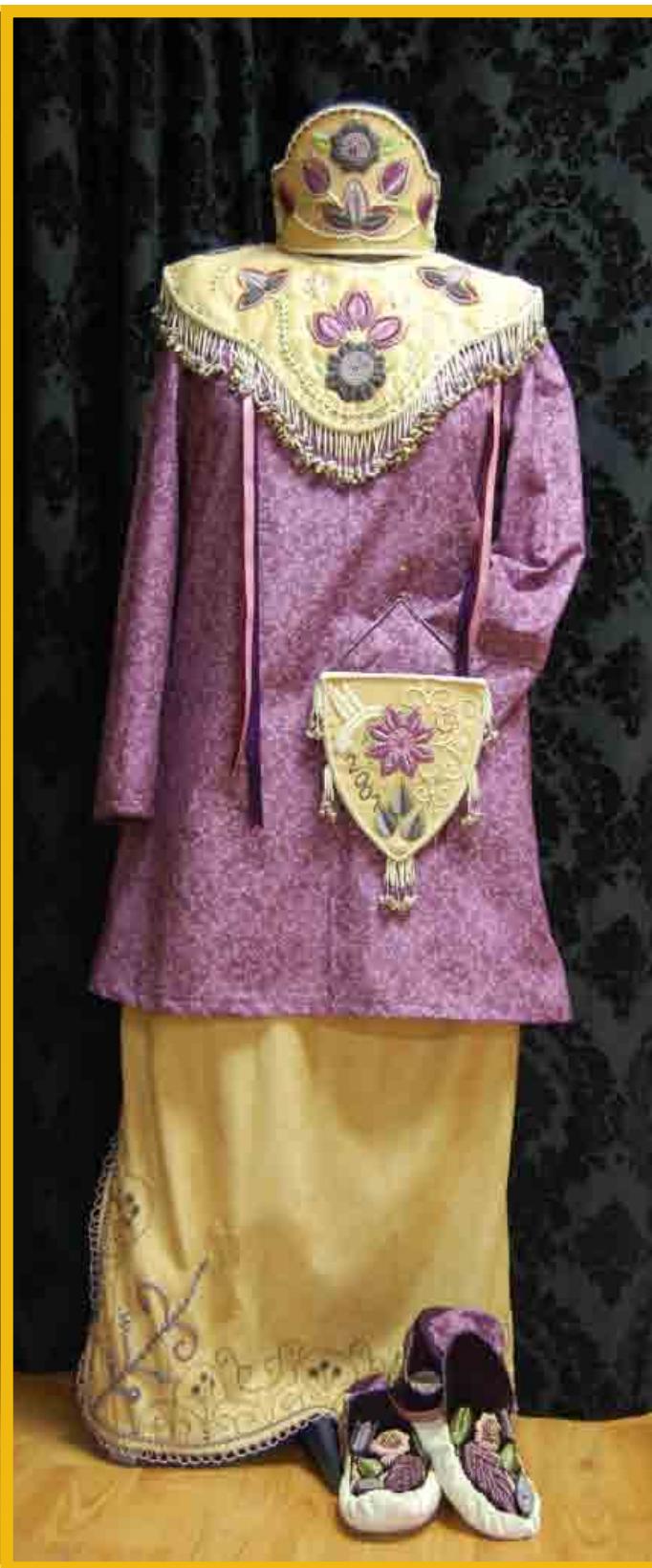
Prior to European contact the Mohawks made their clothing from woven materials and fibers found in their environment. During summer months men and women wore very little clothing due to the heat. In the winter months they wore buckskin and fur fashioned out of the hides and fur taken from deer, elk, moose, rabbit, and bear. Prior to European contact the Mohawks would have embellished their clothing with porcupine quills and moose hair.

After European contact, Mohawks began replacing leathers with cotton materials. The moose hair and porcupine quills began to be replaced with seed beads and satin ribbons. Today Mohawks favor calico cloth (tiny floral print).

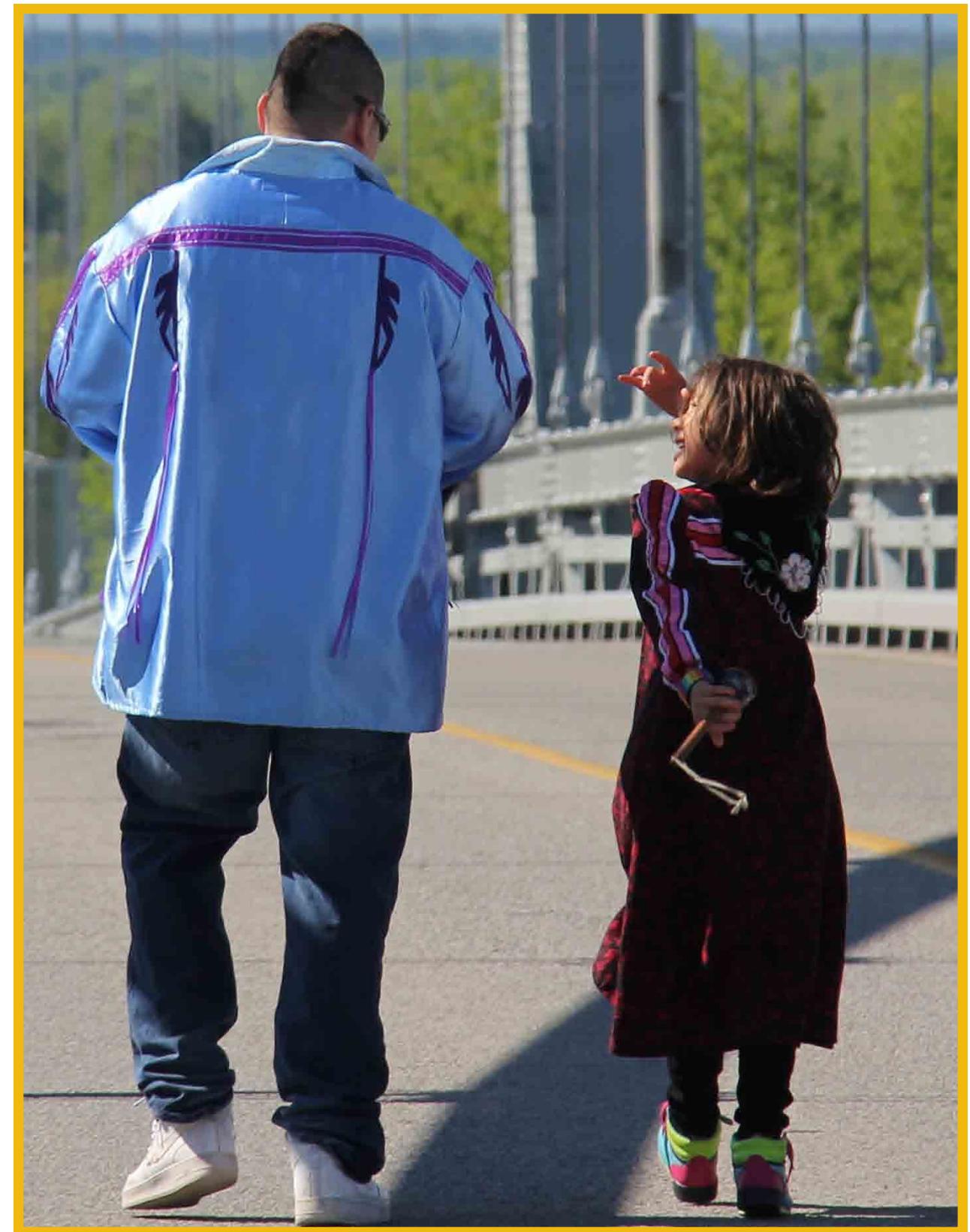
Women's traditional dress consists of an overdress with a skirt and short leggings. The leggings can also have a slit in the front from the foot to just below the knee. The outfit is often decorated with symbols that stand for a clan, Mother Earth, celestial bodies, plants and berries, and elements from the Creation Story.

Men continued to wear buckskin leggings under a breechcloth along with cotton or buckskin shirts as their traditional attire. The arrival of the Europeans led to the introduction of metal. Men began making hatbands, arm bands and broaches using silver and copper. Deer hooves are also found on dance regalia to create a jingling garter.

Today, Mohawks mainly dress in casual, westernized clothing. Traditional clothing remains the normal and accepted attire for special events or ceremonies. Many Mohawks prefer to simply wear the cotton ribbon shirt or ribbon dress along with their leather moccasins. Mohawk women and girls may wear a crown on their heads fashioned out of either cotton or velvet and covered with beadwork. Mohawk men and boys continue to wear a Kastowa or covered feathered hat.



An example of a traditional Mohawk outfit with crown, dress, yoke, skirt and moccasins made by Niiioieron Perkins.



An example of traditional Mohawk clothing mixed with western clothing (Ribbon shirt and dress made by Marlana Thompson)

## Jewelry

For thousands of years, Mohawk people have made and worn jewelry. Designs were created on leather clothing by using dyed porcupine quills, beads from stones, seeds, animal bones, shells, twisted grasses or earth pigments.

Traditional designs included sky domes, floral patterns and geometric borders. These were sewn on deer or bear hides to be formed into capes, dresses, shirts, leggings or moccasins. Beads were worn as pendants and earrings. More often porcupine quills were attached to clothing.



Mohawk beader Nioieron Perkins creates intricate, detailed designs using a variety of bead types and colors.

After European contact, beads of glass and colorful cloth were introduced through the fur trade. The beads were typically worn as necklaces and earrings. It was not until the 1700s that Haudenosaunee beadworkers decorated clothing with European glass beads. In the mid 1800s, Mohawks carried the idea of raised beadwork to new levels with picture frames and pin cushions. Today, clothing for ceremony and performance is often beaded with traditional Haudenosaunee symbols. Beadwork continues to teach history and inspire others to tap into their creative nature.

The art of silversmith among the Haudenosaunee was very popular. Brooches were made for decorative purposes, as the ornamentation of women's dresses and for decorating ribbons, headbands and sashes. Finger rings were made of silver as were bracelets, and arm-bands and headbands. Everything was created daintily, symmetrical and artistically planned.

## Pottery

Pottery was made and used by First Nations communities across the majority of North America. In the Northeast, pottery was decorated with cord-wrapped wood paddles, which produced a woven design in the soft clay. After European contact, there was a steady and rapid decline in ceramic-making as pottery was replaced by the easy access to European copper and brass kettles. Haudenosaunee pottery is easily identified by an incised collar, usually in an alternating line pattern, above a tapered neck designed for suspension over a cooking fire. The bottoms were rounded for sitting the pot on the fires or hot coals.

Although the practice of using ceramic pottery was lost, Akwesasronon artists have been reviving the lost art. It is primarily used as a decoration, not for daily functions.



Pottery was traditionally used for everyday functions. A replica can be viewed at the Droulers-Tsiionhiakwatha Archaeological Site Interpretation Centre)

## Baskets

Basketmaking is a great source of pride for Akwesasronon. Akwesasne Mohawks are credited with mastering this art form and leading the basket trade for many years.

Mohawks use the splints of black ash trees to weave baskets of various design and purpose. Pack baskets are often used for storage or travel. Sweetgrass baskets use black ash splints but also the very fragrant and culturally significant sweetgrass to decorate and complete the basket. The sweetgrass baskets are used for many purposes, even simply for decoration and display. Sweetgrass baskets often have beautiful, intricate designs making them highly valuable.

Weaving a basket takes great skill and patience. It is not uncommon for basketmakers to unweave hours worth of work to correct a mistake.

Today, many Mohawks continue to make baskets. They are sold, traded or given as gifts, especially when a special guest is visiting. Many Akwesasne-made baskets have made their way into museums such as the Smithsonian Institute. They are also a main feature of Akwesasne cultural centres and exhibits.

## Cradleboards

In traditional times, Haudenosaunee infants were kept safe and secure by a specialized piece of wood called a cradleboard. These were made specifically for infants and had blankets and straps adorned to it. Infants would begin using a cradleboard within a few weeks of weeks of birth. This became the viewing platform of the child's new world for up to a year.

The cradleboard was useful for holding the baby while being fed, cared for or rocked to sleep. For some First Nation communities, it also served as a mechanism for transportation.

Elaborate decoration and accompanying wraps was often the work of a close female relative. This is a clear indication of the high reverence in which a new life was greeted upon by the family and community.



A basket made by Charlotte Delormier is pictured at the Akwesasne Cultural Centre.



Cradleboards are still being used today. Pictured is Honotshino John Sharroo in a cradle board made by Tsawi Elijah.

## Contemporary Art

Mohawk artists typically depict a story, a legend, or a piece of history through their craft. Many pieces of art honor traditional culture. Artists choose various tools to convey Haudenosaunee culture through watercolors, oils, acrylics, or pen and ink. Paintings and drawings often represent Haudenosaunee environment, cosmology, clan symbols, ceremonial depictions, and Haudenosaunee history.

Artists have many outlets for their craft. Aside from paintings and drawings artists have done mirror and wood etchings. Paintings have been done over a pregnant woman's plaster belly cast.

The community of Akwesasne has many talented artists and numerous avenues of artistic expression. Art is well recognized as a medium to keep Haudenosaunee culture alive.



An example of Contemporary Art created by Mohawk Artist Kanietakeron

## Canoe

Akwesasne is located along the St. Lawrence River and prior to the invention of cars, railroad tracks or motorized boats, the transportation of choice was by canoe. Akwesasne residents have always been leaders in navigation - particularly on the river - and that trait holds true today.

The traditional Mohawk style of canoe is the dugout, made from a single log. Birchbark canoes were also used by Mohawks and were built by creating a frame of wooden ribs covered with lightweight bark from trees harvested in the early spring.

Canoes remained virtually unchanged in design for thousands of years and were ideal for traveling the St. Lawrence River and streams and lakes in the surrounding areas. When European settlers arrived, the need for canoes grew as commerce increased. Europeans began using and building canoes also.

Traveling the St. Lawrence River by canoe or boat was a daily function in the lives of Akwesasne residents. Akwesasne was known as a fishing community, and many people would use canoes daily in order to get the supplies needed to feed and help support their family members. Akwesasne Mohawks inhabited many islands as well which contributed to their advanced canoeing skills.



*Although canoeing is no longer a preferred form of transportation for Mohawks, recreational canoeing is still popular. Today, paddlers from Akwesasne use (pictured above) in 2012 using several different types of wood.*

*a variety of canoe styles. While most Akwesasnon purchase ready-made canoes, Akwesasne carpenter Robert Lazore constructed a wooden canoe*

## Cornhusk Dolls

Cornhusk dolls have been in existence for thousands of years. Young Mohawk children once played with dolls made of cornhusks, which are the green leaves around an ear of corn. After the corn is picked, the husks are dried. After they are dry, they are soaked into warm water to make them flexible. These soaked husks can then be made into dolls, moccasins, mats and baskets. Some of the dolls were simple, but others were dressed up in intricately made clothing and feathers.

The Cornhusk Doll does not have a face. According to legend, there was a very beautiful girl who would turn everyone's head when she walked by. Unfortunately, she became very vain and spent all of her time looking at her reflection in the water. When it was time to plant the Three Sisters (corn, beans, squash), prepare the animal hides or help grind corn into meal, she was nowhere to be found. But when it was the time to eat, get new clothing, or dance and sing, she was always first in line. The people were unhappy and the Creator became angry so he reached out, took her face and hid it. The cornhusk doll is a reminder that no one is better than anyone else, and we must always cooperate with one another.



These cornhusk dolls made Elizabeth Doxtator (Mohawk from Six Nations) were part of an exhibit found at the Akwesasne Cultural Centre.

## Lacrosse

The Haudenosaunee have been playing lacrosse or “Tewa'a:raton,” (de-wa-ah-la-duhn) for centuries. This game is seen as a gift from the Creator. Traditional teachings remind Akwesasronon about the special relationship they have with the spirit messengers who passed the game on to them.

The gift of lacrosse has a function. In fact, the game of lacrosse serves multiple purposes for the individuals and for people as a whole. Akwesasronon are taught that the game was given to Haudenosaunee by the Creator. The Creator would watch the game like a parent watching a small child, and it is said the Creator is similarly amused.

The game was also played to bestow honor and respect to members of the community who had performed great deeds for the nation.

Traditionally, the players' exhilaration they felt while playing was superseded by the satisfaction they gained by playing a game that could display their affection and appreciation to the Creator for presenting them with such a memorable gift. Traditionally, both teams realized the sincerity of the effort, and there were no feelings of resentment for any incidental contact. Players participated for personal enjoyment and to preserve their physical fitness.



*In the mid 1900s, wooden lacrosse sticks were still being regularly made as seen above. These sticks when finished would be sent across North America and throughout the world.*

Lacrosse is also played to call the Creator's attention to efforts of elders and Medicine People, to give strength to their doctoring and healing. In times of sickness, the medicine people prepare themselves to call upon the life forces of Mother Earth to assist in relieving the sickness. Through this process, the right medicines appear, and are chosen and prepared.

Today, the game of lacrosse is also played as a sport. Akwesasronon and Haudenosaunee peoples have become significant contributors to the modern version of the game. It is currently the fastest growing sport across North America.



*In 2015, lacrosse continues to thrive in Akwesasne. Wooden lacrosse sticks have been primarily replaced by other types commercially, but Akwesasne is recently experiencing a revival in the use and making of wooden sticks.*



A traditional lacrosse player is depicted in a painting by Mohawk artist John Thomas ©

## Ahkwasáhsne Cultural Restoration (ACR) Program

The Ahkwasáhsne\* Cultural Restoration (ACR) Program was established by the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe in 2013 as a result of the St. Lawrence Environment Natural Resource Damage Assessment Settlement. The name of the program in Mohawk is “Áse Tsi Tewá:ton,” which means “make it new again”. This meaning describes what the ACR Program is doing for Mohawk culture: bringing new life to traditions and cultural practices while strengthening the connection of people to the land.

The main component of “Áse Tsi Tewá:ton” is the Cultural Apprenticeship Program. This four-year apprenticeship is based on traditional, land-based and cultural practices in which masters oversee apprentices to specialize and become masters themselves in the areas of: fishing and water use; horticulture and traditional foods; medicine plants and healing; and hunting and trapping. All participants must also commit to learning the Mohawk language with the goal of fluency upon completion of the program.

The main goal of the program is to ensure that culture survives through the increased knowledge of land-based traditions and by increasing the number of people in the community who are practicing traditions in these areas. It is expected that once apprentices become masters in one of the areas, they will commit to passing the culture and the language on to future generations.



Tehawenhriseráthe, who is an apprentice in hunting and trapping through the ACR Program, demonstrates to onlookers how to skin a beaver pelt.

\*Two spellings for Akwesasne/Ahkwasahsne are used throughout the community.

## The Native North American Travelling College

The Native North American Travelling College was established on the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory in 1969 under the name of the North American Indian Travelling College by Ernest Kaientaronkwen Benedict and Michael Kanentakeron Mitchell. It began as a van of resources and eager youth from Akwesasne that traveled from one First Nation to the next, educating people on what it meant to be Onkwehonwe. It has evolved to include a large cultural centre that is used to showcase Mohawk culture and to host cultural events.

The objectives of the Native North American Travelling College are to reach the people, inform them and give them a better understanding of Akwesasne's culture and heritage. Efficiency, determination and commitment are some of the key words used to describe the Center in reaching these goals. And from these efforts, the general public stands to gain knowledge and appreciation of the Native People and their many unique characteristics. This unique and innovative cultural center publishes its own books, pamphlets, and posters; produces audio visual materials; offers a travel troupe that visits schools, universities and festivals, and operates a museum and gift shop. It also offers a wide variety of hands-on workshops.

The NNATC currently staffs a motivated team of eleven knowledgeable cultural educators, artists, public speakers and storytellers. They are continuously learning and engaging the community. They strive to revitalize traditional knowledge while also educating Akwesasne's neighbors.

## Akwesasne Cultural Center

The Akwesasne Cultural Center was founded in 1971 when a library was started to encourage Akwesasnon students' pursuit of education. The museum began in 1972 when community members began donating objects to the newly formed library. The current building that houses the Akwesasne Museum and Library was built in 1986. The Akwesasne Museum offers guided tours, a gift shop featuring Native-made items and exhibits that amaze, educate and entertain. The museum tells the story of Akwesasne through images, objects and interactive exhibits. They aim to protect Mohawk material culture and communicate what is important to the Akwesasne community. Ultimately the Akwesasne Museum reminds others that Akwesasne is a distinct Nation with its own unique history and culture. The library shares resources for all ages, races, and capabilities. The library also offers a variety of cultural activities to families with young children to encourage literacy.



The NNATC Travel Troupe visits schools, universities and festivals to share cultural knowledge.

## Tsiiionhiakwatha/Droulers archaeological site

Approximately 50 kilometers north of Akwesasne, the Tsiiionhiakwatha/Droulers site located in Saint-Anicet, Quebec hosts an archaeological site interpretation center which is a reconstruction of a Mohawk or Iroquoian village where approximately 500 people lived circa 1450. In the 1990s, a farmer by the name of Francois Droulers discovered a shovel that's been dated back to the 15th century. Archeologists then uncovered over 150,000 artifacts. These archaeological digs led to the reconstruction of the village on the site where the artifacts were found.

The site provides guests with the opportunity to experience the Mohawk culture in a hands on, historically accurate environment. Advisors from Akwesasne helped to see the project progress from beginning to end. The full-scale reconstruction of the village allows students, scholars and the general public to develop a precise representation of the Mohawk society and way of life, long before the arrival of the French explorers.



A replica of a traditional longhouse at the Droulers-Tsiiionhiakwatha Archaeological Site Interpretation Centre in Saint-Anicet, Quebec.



The living quarters of the inside of a longhouse at the Droulers-Tsiiionhiakwatha Archaeological Site Interpretation Centre.

## **Ionkwa'nikonri:io –Thompson Island Youth and Elders Camp**

In 1996, community members acknowledged that there was a need for Akwesasne to create its own camp destination that could tie in the vibrant Mohawk culture and strengthen traditional knowledge.

In September 1996, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne designated almost half of the land on Thompson Island (approximately 70 acres) for a camp. Today, this area has become known as Ionkwa'nikonri:io –the Thompson Island Youth and Elders Camp.

The Thompson Island Youth and Elders Camp provides hands-on traditional activities that incorporate all important elements of Mohawk culture, including a strong emphasis placed on the Ohen:ten Kariwatehkwen.

This camp is an ideal place to conduct apprenticeships, courses and programs that will help in cultural restoration. Akwesasne has a rich cultural history that needs to be shared with the world. The Thompson Island Youth and Elders Camp is building a platform to save a culture in danger of becoming extinct and to ensure a better relationship and greater understanding between nations.

At the Thompson Island Youth and Elders Camp, children, teachers and visitors learn life skills on the land, outdoor education, native awareness issues and much more. Most importantly, visitors learn to respect the land, each other, the elders and themselves while feeling proud of their accomplishments and of their heritage.



*At the Thompson Island Youth and Elders Camp, guided medicine walks help visitors learn about plants and their medicinal uses.*

## **Entewatatha:wi Process- Nation Building at Akwesasne**

In 1998, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne submitted a proposal to Canada to become one of the primary First Nation communities to enter into the Nation Building process. This term refers to a First Nation building their own system of governance that reflects local culture and traditions, rather than laws and processes being imposed upon them by Canada and the Indian Act.

MCA began the process of Entewatatha:wi, which means “We Will Govern”, as a project in 1999 and the primary goal was to understand and redefine Akwesasne’s governance and jurisdiction. The secondary goal was to review all sections of the Indian Act and its effects on the Akwesasne community. This has allowed MCA and the community to begin the process of decolonization, restoring the pride in Mohawk people, protecting the lands and resources in Akwesasne territory, strengthening the Mohawk language, empowering the people, fostering community involvement, and educating the seven generations .

After several years of exploratory talks about expanding jurisdiction, Akwesasne and Canada established a negotiating framework through which the parties would pursue Akwesasne’s goals in respect to expanding jurisdiction and governance and diminishing the Canadian government control of 72% of Akwesasne affairs. The purpose of these negotiations is to develop new arrangements that reflect a more respectful and modern relationship between the two governments.

The goal of Nation Building and the Entewatatha:wi process is to assist MCA in building internal governance structures to better suit the needs of its membership. These governance structures will replace some areas of jurisdiction in the Indian Act once the Self Government agreements are signed.



*Entewatatha:wi is moving forward for the next seven generations.*

## Local Arts and Crafts Events

- Homemakers Arts and Crafts Show – March
- Kawehno:ke Arts and Craft show – May
- Akwesasne Mohawk Casino Arts and Crafts – July
- Akwesasne Pow Wow – September
- NNATC Children's Pow Wow – Second weekend of March
- Arts and Crafts Show Akwesasne Seniors Building – October
- Snye Recreation Christmas Tree Enchantment – November
- Kawehnoke Craft Fair – December
- Arts and crafts classes – throughout the year at NNATC and Akwesasne Museum and Cultural Center

## The Powwow Trail

- Odawa Aboriginal Festival – May 3rd week
- Kahnawake Pow Wow – July 2nd week
- Six Nations – July 4th week
- Odawa Pow Wow – August 2nd week
- Kahnesatake – August 4th week
- Tyendinaga – August 2nd week
- Akwesasne – September 2nd week
- Toronto – November 3rd week

## Cultural Centers & Museums

- Native North American Travelling College, 1 Ronathahon:ni Lane, Akwesasne, ON K6H 5R7 Phone: 613-932-9452 Fax: 613-932-0092, E-mail: [info@nnatc.org](mailto:info@nnatc.org)
- The Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center/Museum, 321 State Route 37, Akwesasne, NY 13655 Phone: (518) 358-2240 Fax: (518) 358-2649
- Droulers -Tsiionhiakwatha Archeological Site Interpretation Center, 1800 Leahy Road, Saint-Anicet, Quebec J0S 1M0. 1-450-264-3030, 1-866-690-3030.

[www.sitedroulers.ca](http://www.sitedroulers.ca)

## Art Galleries

- Logans Gallery (Cornwall) – 613-938-3629
- Cornwall Kiosk – [www.cornwallkiosk.com](http://www.cornwallkiosk.com)
- Gallery 101 (Ottawa) 613-230-2799
- Ottawa Art Gallery – 613-569-7660
- West End Gallery (Montreal) 514-933-4314
- Starving Arts Gallery (Montreal)
- Galaria D'art Ambiance (Montreal)
- Art Rage Gallery (Syracuse) 315-218-5711
- Edgewood Gallery (Syracuse) 315-445-8111
- Gallery 114 (Syracuse) 315-299-5536

## Directory



*The Akwesasne Cultural Center houses Akwesasne's library and museum.*

### Akwesasne Cultural Center

321 State Route 37 Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-2461 Alt: (518) 358-2240 Fax: (518) 358-2649 Email: [akwmuse@northnet.org](mailto:akwmuse@northnet.org) or [akwlibr@northnet.org](mailto:akwlibr@northnet.org) [www.akwesasneculturalcenter.org](http://www.akwesasneculturalcenter.org) Upstairs: Provides free services that include book loan, DVD's, interlibrary loans & downloadable E-books. Also access to computers & internet are available. Services: scanning, photocopying, laminating, faxing & printing for a small fee. Downstairs: Museum that specializes in Mohawk black ash & sweet grass basketry. Exhibits, tours, guided tours. Gift shop with a wide variety of Native American products, Hours: 9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Monday – Friday, year-round.

### Akwesasne Notes Bookstore

398 State Route 37 Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-3381 Fax: (518) 358-3488 Large selection of books concerning Native American issues & topics. Also a tourist information center.

### Bead Shack, The

310 Island Road Akwesasne, Ontario Tel: (613) 932-8866 Email: [amfthompson@yahoo.com](mailto:amfthompson@yahoo.com) Sales of Native arts & supplies

### Bumblebee'z Native Painting & Quilts

11 Cree Road Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-4586 Email: [bumblebeezart@yahoo.com](mailto:bumblebeezart@yahoo.com) Paintings & quilts, mix media artwork, interior design wall décor & photography

### Carrie Hill, Artisan

787 Drum Street Road Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-6307 Skilled Basketmaker

**Celebrations Party Supply**

935 State Route 37 Akwesasne NY Tel: (518) 358-2620 Ext. 8 Birthday and theme party supplies, decorations, favors, baby shower supplies, pinatas, balloons and more

**Inez's Art**

545 Cook Road Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-4878 Artist, mainly portraits

**Lenora & Ida's Sewing**

794 State Route 37 Akwesasne, NY Tel: (518) 358-9608 Traditional ribbon shirts & dresses & accessories. Sewing & hemming.

**Little Bear- Ohkwarita:a**

116 Lighthouse Road Akwesasne, Ontario Tel: (613) 933-6569 Email: littlebeardesign@sympatico.ca Website: www.littlebeardesign.ca Embroidered & screen printing Mohawk designs Warrior, Mohawk, Iroquois hoodies, t-shirts, jackets & hats

**Mo' Money Pawn Shop**

480 State Route 37 Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-4120 Pawn shop



*This ironworker cornhusk doll is on display at the Akwesasne Cultural Centre*

**Mohawk Art & Design**

Tel: (613) 935-9281 Alt: (613) 551-1981

Email: jordanthompson@mohawk-art-design.com www.mohawk-art-design.com Original artwork

**Mohawk International Lacrosse**

21 Mitchell Road Akwesasne, Ontario Tel: (613) 936-1175 Email: sales@mohawkintlacrosse.com www.mohawkintlacrosse.com

Hand crafted wooden lacrosse stick manufacturer, retail lacrosse equipment & supplies

**Mohawk Quilts**

1626 River Road Akwesasne, Quebec

Tel: (613) 575-2392 www.facebook.com/mitchellsewing Design & produce one-of-a-kind quilts. Most quilts are machine pieced & hand quilted, some quilts are completely handmade.

**Mohawk Printing**

300 State Route 37 Akwesasne NY, 13655 Tel: (518) 358-3333 Email: info@mohawkprinting.com www.mohawkprinting.com Dye sublimation, promotional products, team uniforms & clothing, mugs & more

**Natasha Smoke-Santiago**

P.O. Box 1365 Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-9786 Email: natasha@storytellershouse.com www.storytellershouse.com Painting & prints, Haudenosaunee pottery, pipe making & sculptures

**Native Creations**

155 State Route 37, Unit 1 Akwesasne, New York Tel: (315) 600-6135 Email: nativecreations@hotmail.com Akwesasne handmade products such as beadwork, quilts, baskets, drums, rattles, paintings, sculptures, canvas, clothing, woodwork, etc.

**Native Petals**

1450 River Road Akwesasne, Quebec Tel: (613) 575-1437 Email: nativepetal@aol.com Traditional wear, quilting, receiving blankets



*Youth will continue to pass on Akwesasne's traditions.*

**No Face Doll Shop**

372 State Route 37 Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-2467  
Making cornhusk dolls for over 30 years, each cornhusk doll comes with a certificate of authenticity. Beadwork & baskets.

**North Star Creations**

24 Frank Benedict Memorial Road Akwesasne, Ontario Tel: (613) 936-8099 Leather shop specializing in creating, designing & sewing traditional leather clothing

**Ohwistahtekon Woodworking**

1636 State Route 37 Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-9427  
“Furniture Built to Last Seven Generations.” Blanket chests, chairs, benches, beds, bedroom suites, kitchen cabinets, hutches & dining room suites.

**Okwaho Creations**

Tel: (613) 551-3699 Email: sales@marlanathompson.com  
www.marlanathompson.com Custom made regalia & beadwork

**Nead Dress & Traully Beauty Shop**

545 Cook Road Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-4878  
Email: withinavoice7@yahoo.com

**Quilts & Custom Sewing**

P.O. Box 803 Akwesasne, New York  
41 Angus Thomas Memorial Akwesasne, Quebec Tel: (613) 575-2290 Custom-made traditional outfits & quilts. Occasional in-stock quilts. Phone ahead.

**Purple Ribbon Gift Shop**

167 International Road, Peace Tree Mall Unit #4 Akwesasne, Ontario Tel: (613) 933-9693 Fax: (613) 933-0519 Unique gifts from jewelry to wedding & baby frames. Mukluks, moccasins, floral arrangements, sweet grass baskets & candles.

**Sacred Smoke Gifts**

88 St. Regis Road Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 600-0217 Handmade native arts & crafts & jewelry

**Standing Arrow Graphics**

P.O. Box 126 Akwesasne, Quebec  
Fax: (613) 936-9354  
82 Raquette Point Rd Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-2788 Fine arts, prints, decals, banners, car wraps & apparel

**Tahy Studio and Design**

32 Harbor Road Akwesasne, Ontario Tel: (613) 938-2180 Email: s.tahy@hotmail.com Authentic Native American artwork, digital designs, T-shirts, clothing, office products

**Wolf Pack & Dream Crafter's Quilt Shop**

1422 State Route 37 Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-4285 Native American gifts, beads, cards & porcupine quills. High quality fabrics with many patterns to choose from. Threads & other quilting supplies.

**Wolf Paw Creations**

63 Light House Road Akwesasne, Ontario Tel: (613) 932-1258  
Uniquely designed traditional clothing, open part-time

**Woodland Mystical Motifs Gift Shop**

112 Pyke Road Akwesasne, New York Tel: (518) 358-9473 Native gift shop







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