

I. INTRODUCTION AND CASE HISTORY

This report contains documentation of an object of cultural patrimony currently within the collections of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), Smithsonian Institution (SI). The wampum belt (NMAI 008386.000) was initially claimed by Richard W. Hill, Sr., former Chairperson of the Haudenosaunee Standing Committee on Burial Rules and Regulations (HSCBRR) on September 17, 2002 as part of a request for the return of human remains, funerary objects, wampum, Medicine Masks, sacred objects, and “Items of National Cultural Patrimony” potentially associated with the Haudenosaunee tribes under their representation.¹ The letter identifies the belt as an item of “national cultural patrimony of the Haudenosaunee” and claims it on behalf of the Six Nations of the Grand River, Ontario, Canada (see Appendix A). The NMAI has developed the following policy regarding repatriation to Canadian First Nations: Section III.E.1 of *The National Museum of the American Indian Policy Governing the Repatriation of Native American Human Remains and Cultural Materials* (approved August 2010) states:

The NMAI will work on a government-to-government basis with First Nations in Canada. Due to recognition and sovereign status rights similar to tribes in the United States, the NMAI will consider repatriation requests from Canadian First Nations relating to human remains and associated funerary objects, unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony.

Under these guidelines, the HSCBRR claim was supported by a letter from Chief William Montour of the Six Nations of the Grand River, dated March 29, 2011 (see Appendix B), appointing the Haudenosaunee Grand Council (hereafter referred to as the “Grand Council”) as the official representative of The Six Nations of the Grand River in repatriation matters. The Grand Council Council in turn designated Myron Hill and Paul Williams of the Six Nations Council of Chiefs at Grand River as their representatives in this matter (see Appendix B). Paul Williams is also the Grand River delegate to the HSCBRR.

Historic records concerning this belt suggest that it was initially presented by the British Crown to the Loyalist Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations Reserve to mark a political agreement between their two governments and was thereafter maintained by the wampum keepers at Six Nations. Towards the end of the ninetieth century, the belt was in the possession of John (*Skanawati*) Buck, Sr., Wampum Keeper of the Grand Council at Six Nations Reserve. Following Buck’s death in 1893, his adult children sold several wampum belts to various individuals, apparently disregarding the Haudenosaunee tradition that dictates that wampum be returned to the Grand Council for transfer to the next appointed keeper. By this means, Emily Pauline Johnson (1861–1913) acquired the belt under discussion. Archival records from the Museum of the American Indian-Heye Foundation (MAI-HF) indicate that George Gustav Heye entered into a contract with Johnson in 1906 for the purchase of the wampum belt (NMAI 008386.000) for \$500.00.

¹ The HSCBRR was established in 1989 as a sub-committee of the Grand Council for the express purpose of handling repatriation matters for the Haudenosaunee (Peter Jemison, personal communication, 9/6/2011)