

The Grand Council's political influence over the people of the Six Nations Reserve began to wane as internal and external pressures for an elected government began to mount.⁸ By the 1890s, the majority of the Council chiefs were Christian (Weaver 1978:532).

These shifts affected some community members' adherence to traditional Haudenosaunee cultural beliefs. For instance, perception of Confederacy wampum belts as cultural property was no longer an absolute; individuals such as John Buck's heirs and Pauline Johnson either did not recognize or chose not to respect traditional views of the belts as national property. Instead they treated the belts as family property that could be inherited or sold. During this period, the Grand Council maintained their efforts to regain the lost belts in order to safeguard them.

V. PROVENANCE HISTORY OF NMAI 008386.000

NMAI 008386.000 before 1893

Readings of the New York and Canadian wampum belts were documented by a handful of nineteenth-century ethnologists and historians. In 1871, Horatio Hale was granted this honor by Chief John Buck, Sr., the wampum keeper of the Six Nations Reserve, and Chief Harry Webster, the wampum keeper at Onondaga, New York. Hale's 1871 photo documentation of the Grand River belts demonstrates that the zigzag belt (NMAI 008386.000) was among the belts held at Six Nations in the care of Wampum Keeper John Buck, Sr.⁹

The meaning of the zigzag wampum belt, NMAI 008386.000, has been recorded twice in twentieth-century literature. In 1928, drawing on an 1887 interview with John Buck, Augusta Gilkison stated:

⁸ In 1924 the Six Nations Reserve adopted an elected government with the passage of the Canadian Indian Act, effectively eliminating the administrative powers of the Grand Council (Weaver 1978:533). Since then, two governments have functioned at Grand River: the elected government, known today as the Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council, and the traditional government, known as the Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee.

⁹ Heye identified the belt [NMAI 008386.000] as both a "League belt" and the "Property of Chief Johnson" (see Appendix C). According to Haudenosaunee traditional law, a Confederacy belt cannot be owned by an individual. Heye's confusion may have arisen from the photograph he was sent by Pauline Johnson that depicted her grandfather, John "Smoke" Johnson, holding the belt (Johnson 1906c; see figures 3a, 3b and 4). However, Gilkison (1928:50) identifies John "Smoke" Johnson as the wampum keeper for Grand River before John Buck, Sr., despite the fact that Johnson was neither Onondaga nor a hereditary chief — two traditional qualifications of wampum keepers — and an Anglican, he treasured the traditional knowledge of his people. He transcribed one of two surviving copies of the Haudenosaunee *Book of Rites* and was known to have the ability to read the wampum belts under the care of the Council of Grand River (Gilkison 1928:50; Johnson 1906c; Keller 1981:28). As Fenton (1989:403) puts it, "[t]here are always discrepancies between native theory and native practice. Practical considerations intervene.... Evidently, leadership roles and responsibilities fell to the able and dedicated" and in this respect it is plausible that John "Smoke" Johnson could have assumed this role for the Grand River delegates to the Grand Council.