

[William] Claus met with the Six Nations and other indigenous nations at Burlington Heights on April 24 to 26, 1815. He used the occasion to communicate to those nations the terms of the Treaty of Ghent, the peace treaty that ended the War of 1812. The record of the treaty council includes the delivery of a 'large belt of black wampum' without a more precise description of the belt. We believe this is the occasion and the belt described by John Buck. (Paul Williams, Council of Chiefs, Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, Ontario and Delegate to the HSCBRR, personal communication 4/15/2011)

Although Mr. Williams' identification of NMAI belt 008386.000 with the "large belt of black wampum" cannot be confirmed, the Grand Council maintains that the belt under claim was a gift from William Claus and relates to the declaration of the Treaty of Ghent which ended the War of 1812.

From the time the zigzag belt was given to the people of Six Nations, it was cared for by a succession of wampum keepers until it eventually came under the stewardship of John Buck, Sr. before 1871, and where it remained until his death in 1893.

NMAI 008386.000 from 1893 to 1905

The history of the zigzag wampum belt from John Buck's death in 1893 until its purchase by George Heye in 1906 highlights the differences of opinion at Six Nations regarding the status of national wampum belts as communal property. The traditional position concerning belts of this type was that they were, and remain, Haudenosaunee national property or cultural patrimony. However, around 1900, individual community members, such as John Buck's heirs and Pauline Johnson, seem to have regarded such belts as personal property that could be inherited or sold. A series of events surrounding the sale of wampum belts during this period emphasizes the contradictory perceptions of wampum belts as cultural patrimony.

From 1897 to 1899, J.N.B. Hewitt of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) attempted to purchase wampum belts from the Buck family for the BAE collection (Hewitt 1897, 1898, 1899).¹⁴ Hewitt's letters suggest that Joshua Buck, John Buck Jr., and Esther Buck were actively engaged in selling the wampum belts after their father's death; Joshua Buck was most active in these negotiations (Hewitt 1897, 1898, 1899). By 1897 the Grand Council took action to retrieve the belts from the Buck heirs:

¹⁴ John Napoleon Brinton Hewitt was part Tuscarora through his mother and was born at Tuscarora Reservation in 1859. From 1886 to 1937, he worked as an ethnologist for the United States National Museum's Bureau of American Ethnology.