

Historic wampum belts return

OHSWEKEN — After the American Revolutionary War, adjustments came to the Iroquois Confederation. Many survivors decided to settle at Grand River Territory which had been set aside by the British Crown for her loyal allies in 1784.

Wampum records, kept by the Firekeepers or Onondaga Nation in central New York state, were shared with the Onondaga chiefs at Grand River Territory in what became Canada. Onondagas who remained in the new United States, kept wampum belts that dealt with the Americans.

Two of the 11 belts being returned to Onondaga Longhouse on Sunday, are well known in Iroquoia and are often quoted during political debate. The famous Two Road or Two Row wampum signifies the separation of the Europeans and the Hodenushonnee (People of the Longhouse) and their laws, customs and ways. They are pledged not to interfere with each other while travelling the river of life.

A Covenant Chain belt sets out the provision that the proper path for the confederacy to follow in dealing with Canada, is through the governor general, the representative of the Crown. This is to be on a nation-to-nation basis

Our Town

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and not through the internal workings of the Canadian government.

Other returning belts commemorate relations with other nations. None are Law or Constitution belts.

There is no provision in the Great Law that covers the return of religious articles. Theft of sacred objects isn't even considered. With that in mind, the Hodenushonnee have decided to share this occasion so that all may be uplifted.

In honor of the belts return, natives are being encouraged to wear aboriginal dress or, at least, something native. Non-Indians are reminded that though this is a joyous occasion, respect for the belts must be maintained by all.

Cameras will be allowed and picture-taking intervals will be provided. There can be no photographs during a tobacco burning ceremony or inside the Longhouse. An English translation will be made for the opening, Thanksgiving address and during a brief summary of the belts' meanings.

This is not a powwow so guests needn't expect any dancing. After the belts have been authenticated, they will be put on display. Though their exact condition is unknown, they are very old and demand utmost care.

It's advisable to bring your own lawn chairs. And a good mind. Limited refreshments will be offered and lunch will be served in the cookhouse. Events are expected to start on or about 11 a.m. Onondaga Longhouse is on Onondaga Road between Fifth and Sixth line.

Though there is no charge for this historical event, those wishing to help out with expenses are asked to send your cheques to: Mr. Thomas Longboat, Box 1478, Caledonia, Ontario, N0A 1M0.