

Recovering Six Nations' heritage in wampums

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to Six Nations historians.

Johnson, who liked to use the wampum belts as dramatic props for her recitals and readings, bought the belts from Onondaga Chief John Buck, who was in charge of keeping them. When he died, his children sold the belts.

Johnson was not the first or the last person to use a culturally significant item as financial leverage, and despite increased knowledge about the loss of cultural items, people still sell their community heritage.

A Vancouver First Nation woman will soon be stripped of her name, title and traditional responsibilities after selling two masks late last year. According to B.C. Newspaper, The Province, the unnamed woman is being punished for her action because the masks were considered community property. The woman's family cared for the masks, the job handled by the women.

It is not known if the First Nation will be able to recover the masks.

While a large number of cultural objects have found their way into museums,

many others are privately collected. In 2011, one Canadian who buys and sells such antiquities, auctioned two Yup'ik masks, fetching millions for the pair, the price ensuring the Yup'ik will likely never see those masks in their community again.

age people from doing that. They're looking at it as purely something that will add to their retirement fund," said Jamieson.

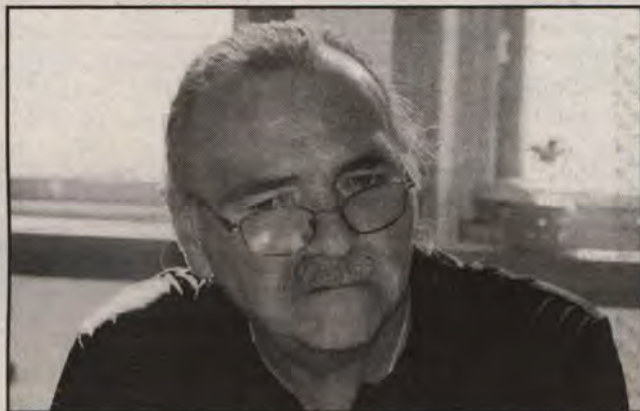
Jamieson said he and other Six Nations members work to keep tabs on artifacts and antiquities that belong to Six

Some of them came from the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and some from the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

Jamieson said he has seen a number of wampum belts

turn up on the Pawn Stars series. "They put it up for sale," he said. "They don't have a clue what it is. They only know it's a wampum belt. We try and intervene before it gets to that point."

"There's no question, those wampum belts are worth, as a collectors item," said Jamieson. "To the people here, it's worth a lot more than dollars. So it's a different value system that you're dealing with."



Keith Jamieson

Once an object goes up for auction, "it's very hard to do something," said Jamieson, "because you're intervening with a fair transaction, from all appearances. Unless you're a big-time museum who can afford to put out a hundred grand for something, we don't have a chance. We don't have a prayer."

The angle Six Nations relies on is to "try to discour-

Nations. Repatriation is not always possible, because often there is no way to prove how an object, like the silver breast plate, managed to find its way from Six Nations hands and into the hands of the owners of the Silver Dollar Pawn Shop, located in the southern United States.

Over the years, Six Nations has been able to get a number of wampum belts returned.