

Huron-Wendat Archaeological Heritage: Challenging the Professionals [Slide 1]

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Introduction

Kwe - we would like to begin by recognizing that we are welcomed on present-day Mohawk territory. This location is a strategic place that has been traditionally used by many First Nations including the Haudenosaunee, the Huron-Wendat, and the "St. Lawrence Iroquoians" whose definition and relationship with the Huron-Wendat will be discussed more in this paper.

When asked if we would participate in this session, we believed it was because the organizers hoped we would be able to speak about a collaborative archaeological project involving academic researchers and the Huron-Wendat Nation, particularly with respect to Ontario archaeology. In the last decade, a great deal of progress has been made towards collaboration, but at this time we would consider most, if not all, Ontario archaeological research projects to be **consultative** rather than **collaborative**. By this, we mean that the Huron-Wendat Nation has been informed of projects, often at the outset, and asked to provide feedback; and in some cases changes may have been made. However, the people conducting the research and the research questions originate outside of the Huron-Wendat Nation and are not necessarily of specific interest to the Huron-Wendat.¹

[Slide 2] An exception to this, and one that suggests a way forward, is a jointly organized conference held last year to mark the 400th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain's sojourn in Ontario. Given that Champlain spent most of his time in Huronia, with Huron-Wendat people, it was essential that the Huron-Wendat past was a focus of this conference. As partners in the organization of the conference, the Huron-Wendat Nation proposed and hosted a day-long session on a subject of particular interest to them. The participants and topics in this session were selected by the Huron-Wendat Nation. Jointly, we were able to obtain SSHRC funding to allow Huron-Wendat and Wyandot participants to travel to attend the conference, and for simultaneous translation. As organizers of the conference we asked the Huron-Wendat and Wyandot participants to identify papers pertinent and informative papers in order that these could be summarized in popular language and put on the web for members of the community who were unable to attend the conference. Conferences such as this could be a starting point for

¹ The term *Huron-Wendat* is used as an encompassing term to refer to the Iroquoian population that lived in what is known today as Southern Ontario in the early time of New France, spoke the same language and identified as "Wendat" (i.e., the Huron and the Petun). The Conseil de la Nation huronne-wendate does not believe that the distinction made by Champlain and the Jesuits between the Huron and the Petun reflected actual ethnic differences and considers both groups and their descendants (i.e. the Huron-Wendat and Wyandot Nations) as Huron-Wendat. When referring specifically to the contemporary community of Wendake, the term Huron-Wendat Nation is privileged.

We suspect that the contemporary Wyandot Nations also share the Huron-Wendat Nation's position on their relatedness to the St. Lawrence Iroquoians. However, since we do not have official statements from the former communities and we do not want to make assumptions or speak in their name, we will only speak for the Huron-Wendat Nation in this paper. However, this does not mean that the Wyandot do not also share the ideas expressed here.

collaboration because dialogue, partnerships, and even friendships, lead to identification of questions of interest to descendants – this is a necessary first step.

[Slide 3] **Consultation** has become standard for archaeologists in Ontario in recent years. In broad terms, in Ontario, consultation or engagement with Aboriginal communities by archaeologists has been driven by government regulation arising from Supreme Court decisions about the Crown's duty to consult and accommodate Aboriginal people. Starting in 2011, consultant archaeologists undertaking certain types of fieldwork were **required** to engage with the relevant Aboriginal communities in advance of fieldwork (Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture 2011). While consultation had been occurring previous to this, one could argue that this was somewhat ad hoc in nature and that it was not until the process was formalized, that archaeologists usually engaged with representative members of the Huron-Wendat Nation (or other First Nations, for that matter). The requirement for Aboriginal engagement is directed at consulting archaeologists (rather than academic, research, or avocational archaeologists), but given that about 98% of the archaeology carried out in the province is consulting in nature, this requirement has had a major impact. It is also worth pointing out that within academic institutions other policies, such as the necessity for Research Ethics Board approval of research projects involving living human subjects or human tissue, also trigger consultation.

But what about **collaboration**? Where, when and how should collaboration start? Why has it been difficult to achieve, and what are some examples of work that is more collaborative?

In the remainder of this paper we will do several things:

1. We will provide some context on the Huron-Wendat people and their history and archaeology;
2. We will discuss some of the areas of research that are of particular interest to Huron-Wendat community members and show how accepted archaeological knowledge systems are being challenged by Huron-Wendat perspectives and priorities; and
3. We will make note of how consultation on heritage and archaeology can provide information and opportunities within the Huron-Wendat community in domains that might not be expected.

The tyranny of a rich ethnohistoric record

[Slide 4] While the history of the Huron-Wendat may be fairly well known to some of you, given that this is an international conference, we would like to spend a few moments providing some background.

Four hundred years ago, when Samuel de Champlain visited Ontario, people who call themselves Huron-Wendat and Wyandot were occupying the lands on the southern part of Georgian Bay, referred to now as northern Simcoe County. At that time they formed a confederacy made up of several nations of different sizes and who, according to oral tradition, had arrived in the area at different times in the previous several centuries. They included a significant contingent from the St-Lawrence Valley.

Between 1615 and 1649 French traders and missionaries lived among the Wendat, establishing both a special-purpose built mission site (Ste. Marie among the Hurons) and a number of missions within Wendat villages. In Canada, this was perhaps the most **focused, sustained, and earliest** effort to

convert an Indigenous population to Christianity. The relationship between the French and the Huron-Wendat was not entirely based on missionizing: the Wendat played an important role as middlemen in trade. The French perspectives on the lives of their Huron-Wendat hosts were chronicled in famous and frequently detailed works by Champlain (Biggar 1936), Sagard (Sagard 1939), and the Jesuits (Thwaites). In the 1630s, the Wendat population suffered huge losses caused by several waves of different European-introduced disease. After struggling for some years and facing conflict from Haudenosaunee peoples, in 1649 the Wendat people left Simcoe, moving in several different directions.

[Slide 5] The movements of the Huron-Wendat after they left Simcoe are too numerous and complicated to detail here, but today, Huron-Wendat and Wyandot descendants live in communities in Wendake, Québec, in Oklahoma, Kansas, and in the Detroit-Windsor area. Colonization resulted in a situation in which there is no Huron-Wendat community recognised in Simcoe county; the members of descendant communities are found in two different countries; they speak two different languages (French and English); and the communities themselves vary with respect to recognition by colonial governments.

The ethnohistoric record continued to be documented by non-Huron-Wendat scholars and researchers who built their reputation and credibility on Huron-Wendat knowledge. The 17th century documents provided rich fodder for historians, anthropologists and geographers. In the 1960s and 70s, several important works synthesized different aspects of Wendat life and culture based on them. Notably, Elisabeth Tooker's work "An ethnography of the Huron Indians, 1615-1649" (Tooker 1991), Conrad Heidenreich's "Huronian" (Heidenreich 1971) and several of Bruce Trigger's books (Trigger 1976, 1990) were read and cited widely. Innumerable undergraduate students read Trigger's short work "The Huron: Farmers of the North" was published in a series of Case Studies in **Cultural Anthropology**. Today, it is gratifying to see undergraduate students reading "Heritage of the Circle" by Huron-Wendat historian Georges Sioui (Sioui 1999).

[Slide 6] While longer works by Trigger were certainly historical in nature, and notwithstanding the dates attached to works such as Tooker's, it can be argued that the rich ethnohistoric record and the synthetic works based on them led to a situation in which Huron-Wendat, or "Huron" became synonymous with the Huron-Wendat of the early to mid-seventeenth century as viewed and interpreted by European missionaries, traders and, at a later date, scholars. That the Huron-Wendat lived on after leaving Simcoe appeared to be of little academic interest, and indeed – despite the well-known work of ethnographer and linguist Marius Barbeau in the 1911-12 - by the late 20th century it had become commonplace to assert that the Huron-Wendat had "disappeared". I personally heard this statement as student. Certainly this is not the case, so such statements possibly suggest that from an outsider perspective the Huron-Wendat had suffered "cultural loss" and were disconnected from their past. Other reasons that possibly diminished anthropological interest in visiting, documenting and understanding the culture and traditions of the Huron-Wendat newly back in the Québec City region could be

1. that Wendake was seen as a small "Canadianized" village with "Euro-Canadian" architecture,
2. that a few members adopted the Catholic religion, and

3. that trade commerce played an important role (as compared with the stereotypical image of the hunter-gatherer aboriginal). Indeed, trade and commerce had ALWAYS played a fundamental role in Huron-Wendat society.

Finally, for Anglophone anthropologists there would have been a language barrier.

Possibly because of its famous past, archaeological interest in Huronia has a long history. Efforts to identify mission sites began as early as the mid-nineteenth century (Jones 1908). With clearing of lands for farming, numerous villages and ossuaries were exposed (e.g., Hunter 1899). By the mid-twentieth century a few academic and avocational archaeologists became involved in work in the region. This has continued to this day, with most research excavations occurring mainly in the context of field schools. However, with a few exceptions, Huron-Wendat involvement in these projects has been minimal.

As we move into the twenty-first century, we aim for a different kind of archaeology, one that is less insular and more oriented towards questions important for descendant communities. It is noteworthy that two of the three examples of research at the conference found to be of particular relevance did NOT pertain to the 17th century homeland of the Wendat.

[Slide 7] Example 1: St. Lawrence Iroquoians and the Huron-Wendat

A fundamental subject of interest to the Huron-Wendat is the archaeological entity known as 'St. Lawrence Iroquoians' (SLI). When Cartier arrived in the Gaspé in 1534 he encountered a group of Iroquoian-speaking people led by the chief Donnacona who were there for fishing and seal-hunting. Cartier's travels in 1535 and 1536 brought him to the present-day Québec City area where Donnacona's people were living in a settlement clustered around an unpalisaded village (Stadacona). Cartier also visited the Montreal area where a people were settled in a single large palisaded village (Hochelaga). Between Stadacona and Hochelaga, approximately five other SLI villages were documented by Cartier. The Cartier-Roberval attempt to establish a colony in the area of Québec City between 1541 and 1543 failed, and when the French returned to the region in 1603, they found the SLI villages abandoned.

Archaeologists traditionally have framed this in terms of a "disappearance" and have sought explanations for this the "mystery" of where the St. Lawrence Iroquoians went. Causes that have been proposed include: European introduced disease, warfare, environmental change causing agriculture to be untenable in the area, changes in trade routes and so on (see Trigger 1976: 214-218 for examples of the range of explanations). Over time, archaeologists described a set of artefact types common on St. Lawrence Iroquoian sites, including most notably, pottery of particular styles (e.g., Jamieson 1990). An archaeological construct "St. Lawrence Iroquoians" came to represent a people – those people encountered by Cartier. Furthermore, this construct (people?) was seen as distinctive from the archaeology of other northern Iroquoians, such as the Wendat and the Attawandaron. Jumping from pots to people, archaeologists considered the Wendat to be a different ethno-political group from the St. Lawrence Iroquoians.

Various research presented at the conference showed archaeological evidences of the presence of SLI in Huron-Wendat villages (Ron Williamson, and Peter Ramsden) and movements of SLI from their

commonly used territory in the St-Lawrence Valley to the West, the more commonly used territory of the Huron-Wendat (Christian Gates St-Pierre, Roland Tremblay and Michel Plourde). Linguistic similarities between Huron-Wendat and SLI was also presented (John Steckley). Finally, research presented at the conference by Marianne Gaudreau and Louis Lesage (Gaudreau and Lesage in prep.), and research written up for publication in the proceedings by Jean-François Richard demonstrates other clues of a close relationship between these two groups. Firstly, the Huron-Wendat assert that they are the same people as the St. Lawrence Iroquoians and this is not new idea, but can be found in multiple historical documents and oral tradition. This presents an important but not insurmountable challenge to archaeologists understanding of the past, mainly because archaeologists have come to conflate ethnic identities and archaeological constructs.

It is important to decouple Huron-Wendat identity or ethnicity from the Huron-Wendat political entity of the 17th century as recorded by French explorers and missionaries. The confederacy was something that existed for a period of time under socio-political circumstances that will probably never be explained in detail. On the other hand, **Huron-Wendat ethnic identity both pre-dates and post-dates the 17th century confederacy.**

A number of archaeologists have shown that material culture and ethnic identity should not be expected to align perfectly. Gaudreau and Lesage point out that 'ethnicity... is understood as a large-scale social group identity founded on a real or assumed shared belief in a common ancestry, and involves a process of self-identification.' (Gaudreau and Lesage in prep.) Archaeologists, without access to belief systems, are hard pressed to define or delineate ethnic groups. In light of this, while there are distinctive attributes of the material culture of the St. Lawrence Valley in the sixteenth century, we cannot take this to mean that the people of the St. Lawrence were distinct ethnically from Iroquoians living further west, including in Ontario.

One could argue that in refusing to discuss anything except for archaeological cultures, as defined by pottery types, point forms and other material traits, archaeologists are in a sense abdicating any kind of responsibility interpreting how living peoples today may be related to peoples in the past. Archaeologists such as Gary Warrick pointed out at the conference that this has potentially serious impacts on questions related to land claims and treaty rights, and this is relevant to the case of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians and Huron-Wendat. 'Disappeared people' and **terra nullius** are certainly convenient for colonizing settler peoples.

[Slide 8] Example 2: Post-relocation of Huron-Wendat and Wyandot

As we already described, in the mid-seventeenth century the Wendat left the Simcoe County area. The people who made up the confederacy made choices to pursue different alliances in light of the difficulties in Huronia. In several waves, Wendat arrived in the St. Lawrence area (mainly Québec) – an area of traditional importance and with which many were familiar because of trade in the 17th century. Others joined the Tionnontaté and eventually the Odawa and through the second half of the seventeenth century these people lived in a number of communities in the Upper Great Lakes. One of the member nations of the confederacy, the Tahontaenrat, negotiated to join the Seneca.

The post-relocation Huron-Wendat and Wyandot have garnered almost no archaeological interest, and it is worth considering the reasons for this. To some degree, this may lie with the nature of the archaeological record. Unlike pre-relocation sites, these settlements were occupied for shorter periods of time; they are fewer; the sites are not geographically connected or circumscribed within a small region; and the people who created these sites were ethnically diverse. However, as John Creese (Creese 2015) points out, these sites are interesting from the vantage point of resiliency. To ignore them, and to ignore the post-dispersal history, is to contribute to the myth that the Wendat and Wyandot disappeared. The archaeology of the post-relocation period has potential to contribute to understanding how people experienced and negotiated population-level movement. This is a question that could not be more relevant today.

[Slide 9] Example 3: Researching Ancestors

One of the most sensitive research areas for Indigenous peoples and one which has changed considerably in recent years pertains to excavation and study of buried human ancestors. In the case of the Huron-Wendat ancestors, we have seen significant improvements in this area over the last seventy years.

In 1946 an avocational archaeologist, Frank Ridley (re)discovered an ossuary (communal burial pit) that he believed fit the description of the Ossossané ossuary where Jean de Brebeuf witnessed the Wendat feast of the dead in 1636 (Ridley 1947). Over the course of 2 seasons, staff from the Royal Ontario Museum excavated this ossuary (Kidd 1953).

While a number of ossuaries had been discovered and excavated prior to this, these were informal excavations, sometimes carried out by curiosity seekers living locally. The excavation of Ossossané was one of the first academically oriented excavations, which carried on through Simcoe and southern Ontario until 1975 when the Ontario Heritage Act came into force. Subsequently, ossuaries have been excavated, but in the context of development work when they have been encountered accidentally during construction or trenching. While some of these have been moved, the Huron-Wendat Nation has indicated by resolution that from now on, in the unfortunate event that ancestors bones are encountered accidentally, the burial ground will not be moved and development must be rerouted.

The ancestors' bones and accompanying funerary items from Ossossané were studied by a number of scholars after 1948, but it would appear that these findings were not effectively shared with the Huron-Wendat descendants (Kapches 2010). In Ontario, as in other jurisdictions, in the early days, there was no consultative process that engaged descendants to consider IF ancestors should be exhumed for study, and if so WHAT research questions and techniques should be used. In the late 2000s a Huron-Wendat elder explained her perspective about the Ossossané ossuary to me: the archaeologists had the bones for many years and didn't do anything with them, well then, the time had come to return them to the earth from which they had been taken. The Huron-Wendat now are engaged in the reburial of many other groups of ancestors, including many hundreds of individuals in the next year. It will probably take a generation to rebury the ancestors that have been exhumed during the last hundred years. This is a duty that has to be done in respect of the souls of the ancestors that are still living in these bones.

In the late 1990s, after lobbying by descendants from Wendake, the Royal Ontario Museum entered into an agreement with the Huron-Wendat Nation to repatriate the ancestors and funerary materials from Ossossané (Kapches 2010). The 1999 repatriation can be seen as pivotal for two reasons: firstly, it marked the first time in 350 years that Huron-Wendat and Wyandot from across Canada and the United States came together to participate in ceremonies in their 17th century homeland. The event brought together long separated relatives who would go on to participate in future conferences, events and projects, thereby strengthening connections between communities. Secondly, it set the stage for future repatriations. It would be disingenuous to suggest that all archaeologists and anthropologists in Ontario were, at the time, in agreement with the return of the Huron-Wendat ancestors. With time, however, academics have come to a clearer understanding of the position of the Huron-Wendat and Wyandot with respect to their ancestors and most accept that repatriation is the correct thing to do.

[Slide 10] In 2013, a second large repatriation (Thonnakona) involved over 1600 Huron-Wendat ancestors and also involved years of planning. Again, this was a complex process, as is documented by two of the people who spear-headed it: Susan Pfeiffer and Louis Lesage (Pfeiffer and Lesage 2014). One significant difference between the Ossossané repatriation and the Thonnakona repatriation is that after careful consideration, the Huron-Wendat agreed to place one tooth from each individual and samples of diseased bone in a repository at the University of Toronto for future study. They made this decision based on the premise that they believed the ancestors would be willing to make the gift of a tooth if it would contribute to knowledge about their people and to help their descendants to better understand their lives and times. The change in the practice of study is indicated by the fact that these teeth can only be studied through an application process to the Huron-Wendat Nation.

What may be surprising to some is that the research Susan Pfeiffer and her colleagues presented at the conference based on these tissue samples was of a high degree of interest to Huron-Wendat and Wyandot participants. Evidence for this came from both the excellent attendance at her (8:30 am Sunday morning) presentation, and by the request of the Huron-Wendat to include this presentation in the web summaries. To date, this work has focussed on diet and age of weaning; but continuing work on genetic ancestry and health (Pfeiffer 2015).

Challenges

We have outlined briefly three of the areas of research in which archaeologists, Huron-Wendat and Wyandot engage with one another. While at different stages, each of these poses challenges to professional archaeologists but has potential to contribute meaningfully not only to archaeological bodies of knowledge but also to Huron-Wendat and Wyandot communities. Work on the 'St. Lawrence Iroquoian question' asks us to reconsider what we mean by ethnicity and how it relates to archaeological constructs. Work on the post-relocation Huron-Wendat and Wyandot past will entail tackling low-visibility multi-ethnic sites that are disconnected in space but are important for understanding Huron-Wendat and Wyandot resilience. Research on human ancestors is providing results about changing diet, among other things, but researchers are challenged to a) ensure that research questions are relevant to Huron-Wendat and Wyandot people and b) employ minimally destructive analysis techniques to allow for future research.

[Slide 11] Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to point out that while we may aim towards collaboration, consultation also brings positive impacts, and not all of these are specifically archaeological. Three brief examples:

- Archaeologists have access to data on the presence and distribution of plant and animal species that are of interest today for reasons of conservation. Recently, a member of the Huron Wendat Nation was able to complete a study on the historical distribution of several species at risk and one of the sources of information for this study was the large database of identified animal remains from archaeological sites. This underscores the importance of
 - o Sharing these data
 - o Formatting them in a way that is easily searchable

- A second example comes from the Ministry of Transportation in Québec, where the Huron-Wendat Nation was consulted over a road widening through the Réserve Faunique des Laurentides. Historical data showed that the road followed the path of a Huron-Wendat trail used to travel from Quebec City to Lac St. Jean, where they hunted and fished. The Huron-Wendat Nation was consulted in order to determine both the present-day impacts and the impact on areas with archaeological potential. In addition to the decision to move the road in some areas to avoid sensitive locations, the consultation led to creation of a company in partnership with the Huron-Wendat Nation, and in which the Nation had a 51% share. The company was involved in the road construction, but in addition to the benefit to the Nation in being involved in this contract, there was also long term benefit in the training of Huron-Wendat staff, and also, through a school at Wendake, in the training of francophone Aboriginal youth in use of heavy machinery.

- Thirdly, as I was preparing this talk, I was approached by a member of the Huron-Wendat Nation to provide details of reports and images of artefacts from Ontario sites that would serve to assist her in writing a work of historical fiction.

These diverse examples show the importance of heritage in the daily lives of Huron-Wendat and Wyandot people today. As archaeologists we often spend our time looking down ... into holes, into boxes, and at tables in the laboratory. When we look up, we see that Huron-Wendat and Wyandot people have not disappeared... they are very much here, they are curious, hungry about their rich historical record and they are challenging traditional archaeological methods, they have research questions and they propose alternative interpretations. We have much to learn, together.

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