

# Wampum



*“Wampum is just a visual device by which memory is kept alive,” Hill said. “Our ancestors were very skilled in how to make these abstract symbols that have great meaning, great power. We also believe that wampum has its own power.”-Rick Hill*

Bound on strings, beads were used to create intricate patterns on belts. These belts are used as a guide to narrate Haudenosaunee & Anishinaabe history, traditions and laws. The origins of wampum beads can be traced to Aionwatha, commonly known as Hiawatha at the founding of the League of Five Nations. Archeological study however, has found it to have been used long before the union of the Nations. <http://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/wampum.html>

Wampum has many uses. One of the uses is to invite the other nations to meetings. These wampum strings are given the topic that all of the nations are to meet and discuss about. At the end of the wampum string is a wooden stick. The wooden stick tells the people of the nation when the meeting is to take place. As each day passes, a notch is cut off the stick and when the notches are all gone, the meeting will take place.

<http://www.onondaganation.org/culture/wampum/>

Wampum also symbolizes titles within the Haudenosaunee. Each position of a Clan Mother or a Chief has their own wampum string. When a person holds this title for the Nation, they carry the wampum to show their place in the community. When a leader falls, the wampum is passed on to the new leader.

When a string of wampum that is held in a person’s hand, they are said to be speaking truthfully. During ceremonies, the wampum strings are used to convey that the speaker’s words are true. People listening to a speaker holding the wampum also know this and are very attentive and respectful of the speaker’s message.

## Significance of the Wampum Beads & Shells

Wampum is created from the shell of a clam. The bead is cut from the white and purple parts of the shell. The shell is thought of as a living record. The speaker puts the words of the agreement into the wampum. Each speaker thereafter uses the wampum to remember the initial agreement and the history that has happened to date.

<http://www.onondaganation.org/culture/wampum/>



Most commonly made from the Quahog, a round clam shell, the word wampum comes from the Algonquin term for the shells. While it is called Ote-ko-a in the Seneca language, wampum is the most widely recognized term.

One of the most prized and often used mollusks for wampum beads is the quahog clam (*Mercenaria mercenaria*). This clam, which lives in the coastal waters of the northeastern United States, has a distinctive shell that yields the purple beads.

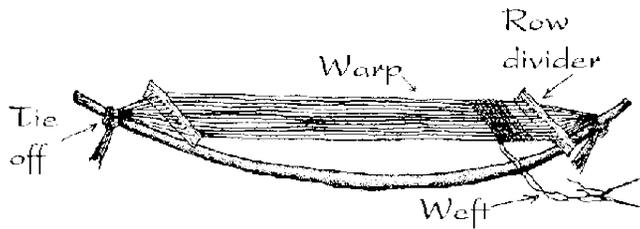
Various whelk species have been used to create the white wampum including the Channeled Whelk (*Busycon canaliculatum*), Knobbed Whelk (*Busycon carica*), Lightening Whelk (*Busycon sinistrum*), and Snow Whelk (*Busycon Laeostomum*).



- Due to the hardness and brittleness of the natural shell materials used, making real shell wampum was and still is a difficult and time-consuming process even today. <http://www.ganondagan.org/Learning/Wampum>
- Shell beads come in many traditional shapes and sizes, including small discs or hishi beads. Before contact with Europeans, shell beads were either disk shaped, or barrel shaped, usually made from the whelk's spiraling inner columnella. Other shapes of shell beads include tubes, and other forms resembling a ball, cone, diamond, square, or hourglass. <http://www.nativetech.org/wampum/wamphist.htm>
- White wampum signifying peace while purple relates messages of more serious or political matters.

*The white whelk shell is a symbol of power and peace and all the good things, and the purple or black quahog clam shell is just the opposite. "I thought it ironic that in the ocean," said Hill, "these two are kind of enemies of each other... but the whelk can actually defeat the quahog clam. So the white shell can overcome the purple shell in the ocean and maybe that's what our ancestors believed." –Rick Hill 2014*

## Wampum Belts



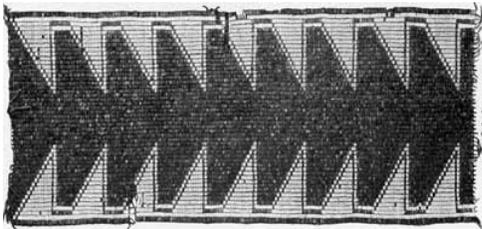
- The use of wampum beads has been much debated throughout the years with many claiming that Aboriginal people used the beads as currency. Contrary to misconceptions, wampum was not "Indian money."
- Wampum clearly had value as a trade item between the various Native peoples before European contact. But it was later on after European settlement of America that wampum began to be used like currency.
- For the Haudenosaunee & the Anishinaabe, wampum held a more sacred use. Wampum served as a person's credentials or a certificate of authority. It was used for official purposes and religious ceremonies and in the case of the joining of the League of Nations was used as a way to bind peace.
- Every Chief of the Confederacy and every Clan Mother has a certain string or strings of Wampum that serves as their certificate of office. These strings can have a variety of meanings. Some strings are invitational, some call for mourning or condolence and some are used to call a council.
- When they pass on or are removed from their station the string will then pass on to the new leader. Runners carrying messages would not be taken seriously without first presenting the wampum showing that they had the authority to carry the message.
- As a method of recording and an aid in narrating, Haudenosaunee & Anishinaabe warriors with exceptional skills were provided training in interpreting the wampum belts. As the Keepers of the Central Fire the Onondaga Nation was also trusted with the task of keeping all wampum records. To this day wampum is still used in the ceremony of raising up a new chief and in the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving ceremonies. True wampum is scarce today and only wampum strings are used. Many belts have been lost or are in museums to this day.

## Commonly Known Wampum's:



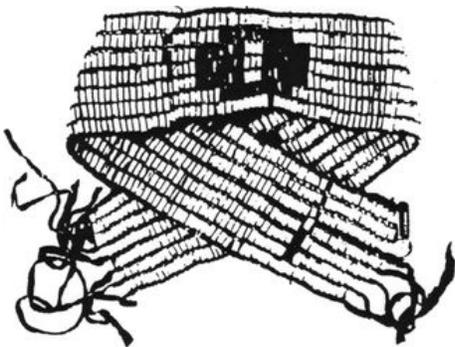
### ***Hiawatha Belt***

A broad dark belt with 38 rows. It has the symbol of the great tree in the centre with two white squares on either side. All are connected by rows of white wampum. This wampum belt conveys the unity of the five nations.



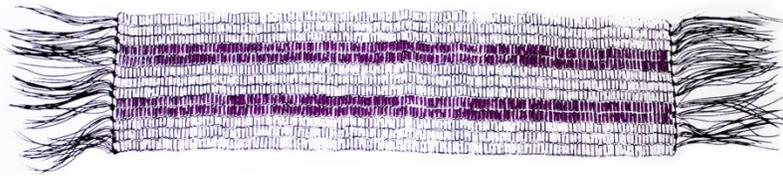
### ***Wing or Dust Fan of the Confederate Nations***

This belt symbolizing an everlasting tree is the widest wampum belt known.



### **The dish with one spoon wampum belt**

“is probably the most significant in terms of the Native people in this land,” said Hill. “The old people say this represents the first treaty made in North America. It was made between all the Native nations before the Europeans arrived. It’s a simple belt with a field of white which represents peace and unity and harmony, with a little dark figure which represents the bowl.” Some of the belts contain an icon within the bowl that represents a beaver tail. (Rick Hill, 2014)



## Two Row Wampum- *Gusweñta*

*“Together we will travel in Friendship and in Peace Forever; as long as the grass is green, as long as the water runs downhill, as long as the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, and as long as our Mother Earth will last.”*

In 1613, the Mohawks noticed people coming into their territory unannounced. The visitors had begun to cut trees and clear land for their homes and farms. They had entered the lands of the Haudenosaunee and were now occupying some of their empty rooms (land). The newcomers dressed oddly and had hair on their faces. They had iron pots and pans and had their families with them. These people needed a place to live. The Mohawks sent a runner to Onondaga to convene a meeting of the Haudenosaunee.

At the meeting it was discussed that a delegation must travel to where these people had settled to determine their intentions. It was difficult for the delegation. The people they met spoke in a language they hadn't heard before. It took much time and patience for the two people to begin to communicate.

After many discussions, it was decided that the Haudenosaunee and the Europeans must have a way to greet each other when they meet. The settlers with their large sailed boat thought that they should be called “Father” and the Haudenosaunee “Son.” The Haudenosaunee said that this would not do. “We shall address each other as ‘Brothers.’ This shows that we are equal to each other.”

As the Haudenosaunee and Dutch discovered much about each other, an agreement was made as to how they were to treat each other and live together. Each of their ways would be shown in the purple rows running the length of a wampum belt. “In one row is a ship with our White Brothers’ ways; in the other a canoe with our ways. Each will travel down the river of life side by side. Neither will attempt to steer the other’s vessel.”

The principals of the Two Row

The Haudenosaunee and the Dutch agreed on three principles to make this treaty last.

1. The first was friendship; the Haudenosaunee and their white brothers will live in friendship.
2. The second principle is peace; there will be peace between their two people.
3. The final principle is forever; that this agreement will last forever.

## Importance of Gusweñta today

The Haudenosaunee see the Two Row Wampum as a living treaty; a way that they have established for their people to live together in peace; that each nation will respect the ways of the other as they meet to discuss solutions to the issues that come before them.

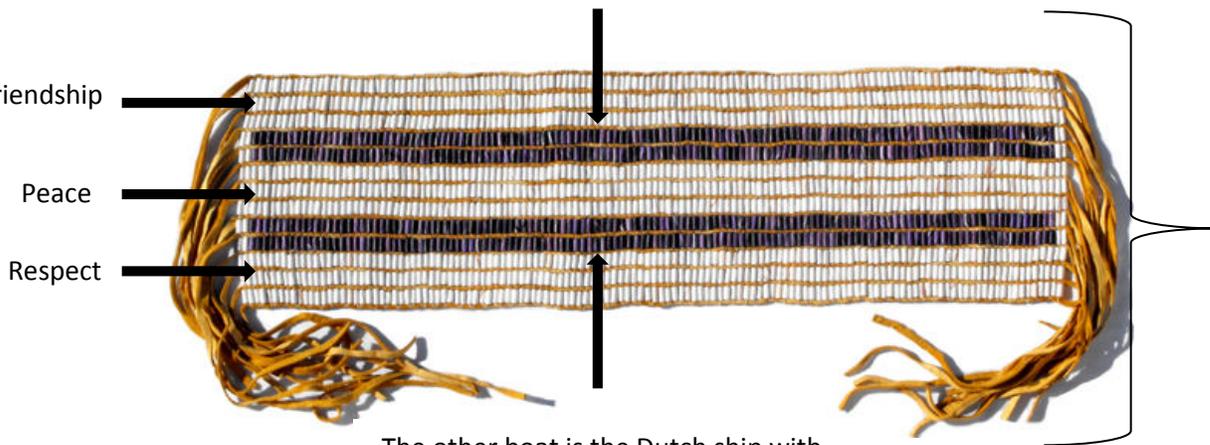
*\*A treaty is a negotiated agreement that sets out the rights, responsibilities and relationships of Aboriginal people and the federal and provincial governments.(Ontario.ca)*

The Haudenosaunee made a belt to record this agreement. The belt has two purple rows running alongside each other *representing two boats*. The background of white Beads was meant to symbolize the purity of the agreement and some say that it represents the "River of Life".

Between the two rows of Purple beads, are three rows of white beads. These were made to stand for the Friendship, Peace and Respect between the two nations. As much as the three rows keep the two nations separate, it also binds them together.

One boat is the canoe with the Haudenosaunee way of life, laws and people.

The other boat is the Dutch ship with their laws, religion and people in it.



The boats will travel side by side down the river of life. Each Nations will respect the ways of each other and will not interfere with the other.

Wampum Prezzi:

[http://prezi.com/8i3zd1jbony-/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy](http://prezi.com/8i3zd1jbony-/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy)

Resources:

<http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/wampum-holds-power-earliest-agreements>

<http://www.c-span.org/video/?321414-2/discussion-usnative-american-treaties>

<http://www.nativetech.org/wampum/wamphist.htm>

<http://www.onondaganation.org/culture/wampum/>

<http://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/wampum.html>

<https://www.ontario.ca/faq/what-treaty>