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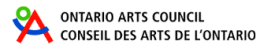
# Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: Nationhood, Diplomacy, and Identity

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For: Mnaajtood ge Mnaadendaan / To Honour and Respect Project

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**Mnaajtood ge Mnaadendaan:**

**Miigwewinan Michi Saagiig Kwewag Miinegoowin Gimaans Zhaganaash Aki 1860**

**To Honour and Respect:**

**Gifts from the Michi Saagiig Women to the Prince of Wales, 1860**

Honorer et respecter:

Dons des femmes Michi Saagiig au prince de Galles, 1860

This resource was created for the To Honour and Respect project, 2023. Co-curated by Dr. Lori Beavis (Hiawatha) and Dr. Laura Peers, the To Honour and Respect project brought quilled birchbark makakoons (baskets) that were made at Rice Lake Village (now Hiawatha First Nation) in 1860 as gifts to HRH Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, back to the Peterborough Museum & Archives from April to November 2023. The project included associated tours, quillwork and Nishnaabemowin language lessons.

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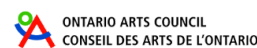
Miigwech (thank you) to the project's funders:

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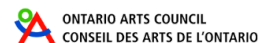
· The project partners acknowledge with gratitude that this project has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada, ce projet a été rendu possible en partie grâce au gouvernement du Canada.

Miigwech to Royal Collection Trust for the loan of the 13 makakoon. All images of the makakoon are courtesy Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III, 2023.



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# Who are the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg?

By Chadwick Cowie, Hiawatha First Nation

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## Definitions:

- Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg – The People that Live at the Mouth of Rivers
- Mississaugiig – Singular (One Person)
- Michi Saagiig – Plural (more than one person)
  - Michi Saagiig were ‘coastal’ peoples who tended to follow the waterways within their traditional territory and ‘make camp’ at the mouth of rivers
  - Fishing salmon, trapping beaver, harvesting sap, to name but three items, were of extreme importance to the Michi-Saagiig Nishinaabeg (with harvesting, fishing, hunting/trapping still and continuing to be important,
  - Traditional territory stretches across much of present-day southern and central Ontario (if one needed to look at a map in present-day). Michi Saagiig understandings of territory are difficult to convey in a western/settler construct sense
  - Currently there are six recognized Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Communities:
    - Alderville First Nation (AFN)
    - Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN)
    - Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation (MSIFN)
    - Mississwezahging (Mississaugi 8 First Nation)
    - Oshkigomog (The Curve in the Lake) – Mississaugas of Curve Lake First Nation (MCLFN)
    - Pamitaashkodeyong (Where it Burns/Where it Travels) – Mississaugas of Rice Lake/Hiawatha First Nation
  - Shared territory and intermarriage occurred with other nations within and outside of the Nishinaabeg.

## What is the Anishinaabeg Confederacy:

The Anishinaabeg composes of nations such as the Bodewadami, Algonquin, Odawa Nishnaabeg, Chippewa’ag Nishnaabeg, and the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg.<sup>1</sup> When looking at a

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<sup>1</sup> Doug Williams, *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This is Our Territory* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Press, 2018), pps. 119-124; Borrows, *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*, pps. 77-78; Donald Smith, *Mississauga Portraits: Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 33); Donald Smith, *Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) and the Mississauga Indians* (Toronto: University of



present-day map of North America, the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg Confederacy include portions of Western Quebec, much of Ontario, Southern Manitoba, as well as sections of the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan. Thus, cities such as Ottawa, Toronto, Detroit, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and Winnipeg are situated on the traditional territories of the nations which are members of the Anishinaabeg confederacy.

Like the Haudenosaunee, the utilization of clans, dotems, were significant and important to the political, legal, and sociological constructs within the nations of the Anishinaabeg. Each dotem reflected an animal which inhabited territory or waters that the Anishinaabeg call home. The types of animals associated with dotems were referred to as those with 'hooves,' 'sea creatures,' 'paws,' and 'those that fly.' Each dotem had important duties within the nations of the confederacy and can be compared with Ministries or Departments we see existing within settler states like that of Canada. For instance, Lawrence Henry Sitting Eagle, in a document prepared for the Anishinaabeg community of Roseau River, explains that dotems that are named after those that fly, such as the Crane and Loon clans, reflect leadership roles. Those in the Crane and Loon dotems, as Sitting Eagle specifies, "should know everything about everything, [holds] knowledge of statesmanship ... [and] must be knowledgeable in negotiations, plan[ning], [as well as] strateg[izing]."<sup>2</sup> More specifically, Sitting Eagle explains that the Crane dotem reflects a combination of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Foreign Affairs, while the Loon dotem reflects Intergovernmental affairs.<sup>3</sup> Other dotems that reflect those that can fly, such as the Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle and Hawk, focused on understanding the natural landscape, the flora and fauna that grow on it, harvesting, spirituality as well as knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Clans such as the Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, and Hawk thus can be compared with spirituality as well as Agriculture and Education Ministries.

Sitting Eagle continues his explanations, highlighting that dotems which reflect those with paws, such as the Marten, Muskrat, Beaver, and Wolf, are responsible for not only strategizing but also for providing sustenance, peacekeeping, policing, adoption, and enforcement of rules and laws.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in a comparative sense, Sitting Eagle's explanation of dotems reflecting paws to be more similar to Canada's Ministries of Justice and Defence. Additionally, Bear dotems, although also assisting with policing and peacekeeping, are considered to be the healers and those with knowledge of medicine.<sup>6</sup> According to Sitting Eagle's explanation, the Bear dotems are most similar to a Ministry of Health.<sup>7</sup>

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Toronto Press, 2013), pps. 1 & 17; Also See: George Copway, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of The Ojibway Nation* (Toronto: Propsero Canadian Collection, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Henry Sitting Eagle, *Clan Responsibilities: Ojibway Clan Systems: The Seven Original Clans* (Prepared for Roseau River/Roseau Rapids Anishinabe Nations, 2011), pps. 1, 27-28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 27-28.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

In relation to dotems that represent sea creatures, such as fish, turtle, and snake, Sitting Bull describes their duties as caretakers of water, assessing changes in the seasons, and stargazing.<sup>8</sup> When comparing sea creature dotems to a ministry, they would encompass what is referred to as science and technology. Lastly, the dotems that fall into the category of ‘hooves,’ such as elk, moose, and deer, tend to not only have the gift of visual and performing arts but also the gift of sound.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, hoof dotems assist with settling disputes and the social welfare of the community.<sup>10</sup> The most comparable ministries to the hoof dotems would thus be social services and heritage. In summarizing the system of dotems, Sitting Eagle concludes that the dotem system creates the ability for “every person to belong with a role and status ... [where] we [are] collectively promulgated and taught so that particular talents might radiate among our people, yet at the same time maintaining personal identity of the individual.”<sup>11</sup>

In addition to being giving tasks and responsibilities, the dotem system, like the clan system of the Haudenosaunee, were consensus based and represented in the governance structure of the Anishinaabeg. Furthermore, those representing the clans and nations could also remove Chiefs from their positions if unfit to govern.<sup>12</sup> Thus, although a person could become Chief because they were a descendent of the previous Chief, it was not absolute and a person could be easily replaced. Preventing an ‘absolute’ form of power and control was key for allowing all Anishinaabeg to not only have a say but to also show a right to belong within the confederacy and the member nation of which they were a part.

The Anishinaabeg understanding of belonging to a community, nation, and within the confederacy has never been one simply based on a birthright. As Leanne Simpson points out in her book *Dancing on our Turtles Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*, a system of adoption and immigration were just as important for belonging within the social, political and legal order of nations within the Anishinaabeg confederacy. Simpson points out that the system for immigration was a lengthy process because of what needed to be achieved to prove one’s ability to live up to the standards of Anishinaabeg belonging.<sup>13</sup> An individual, whether adopted, married in, or a descendent of Anishinaabeg parents, proved their belonging by commitment to the values and philosophies of *mino bimaadiziwan*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; Also see Borrows, *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*, pps. 77-84.

<sup>13</sup> Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Press, 2011), pp. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid; Borrows, *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*, pp. 81; Cowie, “Validity and Potential,” pp. 14; John Borrows, *Seven Generations, Seven Teachings: Ending the Indian Act* (Research Paper for the Nation Centre for First Nations Governance, 2008), pp. 1; Note: *Mino bimaadiziwan*, when translated from Anishinaabemowin to English, means: “following the right path/good path.” (Simpson 2011, pp. 90)

In explaining *mino bimaadiziwan*, John Borrows highlights that it represents “principles that respect and facilitate stewardship, such as loyalty, patience, and bravery.”<sup>15</sup> What Borrows explains are known as the Seven Grandfather teachings<sup>16</sup> and are important tenets to establishing fairness, respect, and order amongst Anishinaabeg people. In doing so, as Borrows further explains, the process, and the rules relating to belonging, are a way not only for people to prove themselves but also to show they truly mean no harm to the Anishinaabeg people and their existence.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, if one did not agree to the required standards of what it meant to be Anishinaabeg, they also had the opportunity to leave and remove themselves from the system and could therefore freely leave their clan, nation, and thus the confederacy. In other words, like many modern states today, the Anishinaabeg allowed for immigration to, and emigration from, their confederacy and thus to be Anishinaabeg required an agreement to fulfill the duties of what modern states and political scientists today define as citizenship.

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<sup>15</sup> Borrows, *Canada's Indigenous Constitution*, pp. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Note: The Seven Grandfather teachings are key to Anishinaabeg belonging because it taught Anishinaabeg important aspects of citizenship and how to live together with the concepts of *nbwaakaawin* (wisdom), *zaagidwin* (love), *mnaadendimowin* (respect), *aakwadeewin* (bravery), *dbaandendiziwin* (humility), *gwejwaadiziwan* (honest), and *debwein* (truth). In many of Borrows' writings, he discusses how the Seven Grandfathers are a key part of citizenship because it not only dictates how citizens relate to one another but also key to foundations of Anishinaabeg law, governance, and the interdependence ideals of the nations within the Confederacy. (See: Borrows' *Seven Generations, Seven Teachings*, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Borrows, *Canada's Indigenous Constitution*, pp. 81.

# Gifting as a component of Sovereignty, Diplomacy, and Nation-To-Nation Relations

By Chadwick Cowie, Hiawatha First Nation  
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## What is Sovereignty?

Sovereignty is a term used to describe a country, or state in relation to control over a fixed territory and therefore the right to a form of government and formation of laws that it can put in place. Sovereignty is believed to be given by a country's citizens participating in its organization of government, laws, and institutions by participating and abiding by said laws as citizens. The term sovereignty and its above definition is not the same for all people around the world, but is the one that is only looked at as real by countries like Canada, Russia, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Brazil, to name a couple of countries.

Sovereignty from the perspectives of many Indigenous nations is not one about territorial boundaries but one that best reflects a form of following the right path and being able to sustain themselves and live alongside other peoples as equals but without interfering with others from different nations. This is how Indigenous nations, such as the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg of the Anishinaabeg Confederacy approached relations and coexistence with non-Indigenous peoples who came to North America after 1492.

## What is Diplomacy?

According to Britannica, the idea of diplomacy relates to the "established method of influencing the decisions and behaviour of foreign governments and peoples through dialogue, negotiation, and other measures short of war or violence." Furthermore, "diplomacy is the chief, but not only, instrument of foreign policy, which is set by political leaders," through themselves or diplomatic representatives such as Diplomats. In relation to Indigenous nations and Canada, this relates to when you hear about treaty rights and the idea of gifts as relationship building, as well as nation-to-nation relations.



## **What is Meant by 'Nation-to-Nation Relations?'**

Nation-to-nation relationships encompass both sovereignty and diplomacy – similar to relationships between the United States and Canada. In relation to Canada, there are treaty obligations that are to be followed in relation to Indigenous nations, who were originally approached as nations who needed to have diplomatic ties secured, protected, or fought against. Additionally, nation-to-nation relationships describe a way in which Indigenous nations should, could, and do interact with Canada and may be different depending on the Indigenous nation. For instance, how the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg look at nation-to-nation relationships may be similar to that of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy but it could also have differences.

## **Gifts as a Component of Sovereignty, Diplomacy, and Nation-to-Nation Relations:**

Through initial research, it is important to also note the importance of gifts in relation to treaties and diplomacy. There is much documentation that highlights that gifts are given yearly not only to Indigenous nations, but also between nations to continue relationships or to bring peace. Such an approach was also used with England, France, and Canada.

Cary Miller and Leanne Simpson, among others, have written about this and that the yearly gifts are a sign of renewing/restarting agreements, relationships, and treaties. This is important to consider and understand when reflecting on relationships with the Haudenosaunee, and other Indigenous confederacies/nations, as well as with Europeans, such as the British and French.

Therefore, gifts are a part of an agreement that is made – and can be seen symbolically in the gifts given, for example, to the Prince of Wales when he visited Rice Lake in 1860. This full understanding has not been documented or explored by those Europeans who kept note – rather they looked at such gifts as a sign of being willing subjects to the British Crown.

# Treaties and Land Surrenders

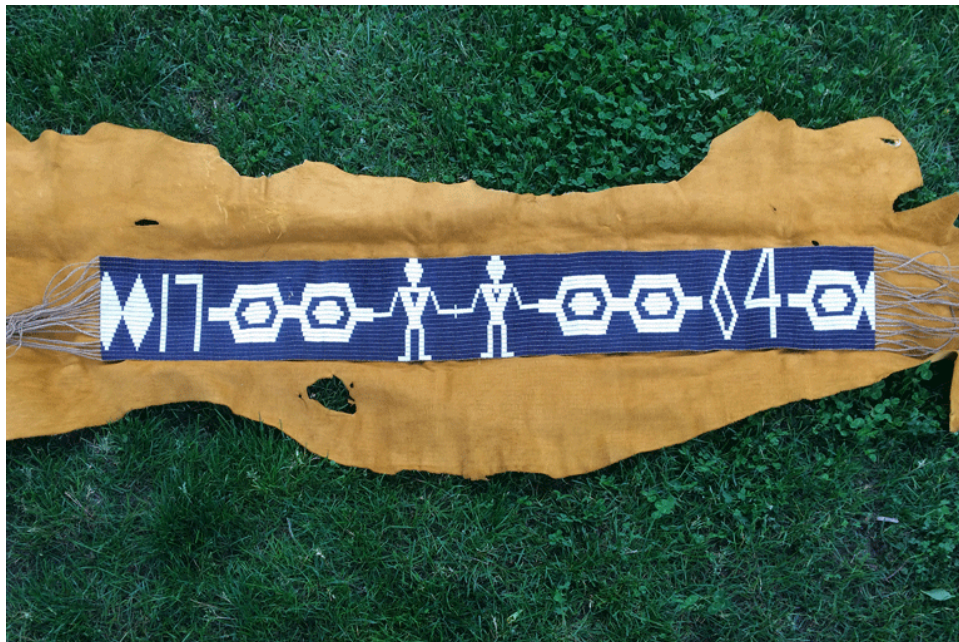
By Chadwick Cowie, Hiawatha First Nation  
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## **Why Did the British Want Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Territories?**

In the history of Settler/British and Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg relations, two important events occurred which allowed for, and contributed to, the movement of non-Indigenous peoples into the traditional territory of not only the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg but also other Nishnaabeg nations. Prior to 1763, the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg were friends and allies of the French, who had begun visiting their traditional territories well over one hundred years earlier. The French and British at this time were not friends, and in fact were enemies who competed for prestige, power, and territory. British colonies to the south, also referred to as the Thirteen Colonies, were fearful of France's power in North America as well as their strong friendship/alliance with many Indigenous nations and confederacies. In turn, British Settler representatives and settlers themselves pressed the British to declare war on France in order to protect them.

The Seven Years War (1756-1763) was fought between the British, the French, and their respective Indigenous allies – the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, like other Nishnaabeg nations, fought on the side of their French allies. In 1763, a peace was established between the British and the French – with the French agreeing to give up their colony, Quebec, and surrendering their place in what is called Canada today. Following the peace, the British enacted the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which outlined laws for British control in North America and how to integrate the Quebec colony into the British Empire. Additionally, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 also made it law that to obtain Indigenous lands from Indigenous nations, it had to be done on behalf of the Crown by its representatives and not by individual people. Although there was a peace between the British and French in 1763, Indigenous nations did not agree to such a peace and fighting did continue for a bit. Such fighting eventually led the British and those Indigenous nations to agree to a three-month long meeting in the summer of 1764 at Niagara. This meeting was to establish peace as well as a new relationship between the British and those Indigenous nations, including the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, who attended.

At this council held at Niagara, three different agreements, symbolized by Wampums/Gus Wen Tahs, were established that were to cement the alliance and nation-to-nation relationships between those nations in attendance with the British. These



agreements/treaties, included the importance of gifts for renewal and coming back together to renew that relationship so the generations to come would not forget.

A replica of the Treaty of Niagara wampum belt. Photo courtesy of Nathan Tidridge.

With the Wampums at Niagara of 1764 and the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the nation-to-nation relationship between the British and Indigenous nations like the Michi Saagiig was cemented and a prime example of nation-to-nation relations, treaties, diplomatic relations, and alliances – all of which were very importance in 1775.

In 1775, those Thirteen Colonies who requested the British go to war with the French, rebelled against the British and demanded their right to autonomy and the formation of their own country. The settler-rebellion, also called the American Revolution, occurred between 1775-1783, and the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, like many other Nishnaabeg allies, fulfilling their duties from the Wampums of Niagara, fought as allies alongside the British. By the early 1780s, the potential of the British winning continued to dwindle and thus concerns over losing control of those Thirteen Colonies led British representatives to begin looking where they could move their loyal subjects, also known as Loyalists, and Indigenous Allies, such as the Haudenosaunee, to if they were to be defeated. Thus, in 1781, the process of ‘purchases, and land surrenders

began to be negotiated with Indigenous nations in territory close to the Thirteen Colonies. In turn, 1781 marked the beginning of a series of agreements and ‘purchases’ that would impact not only the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg as a people but also the territories they were the traditional stewards of.

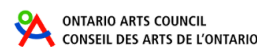
## What Are the Purchases?

The purchases relate to a series of agreements that Settler-British representatives sought to obtain with various Indigenous nations, such as the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, between 1781 to the 1860s. More specifically, when considering the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and other Nishnaabeg nations, such as the Chippewa’ag, Odawa, and Algonquin, these purchases are referred to as the Upper Canada Agreements/Pre-Confederation Treaties. These agreements were negotiated to not only allow British Loyalists to relocate from the Thirteen Colonies to further north but also Indigenous allies who were forced out of their territories in the newly formed United States, and future British settlers who would relocate to North America.

Whether or not Indigenous nations, like the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg understood these agreements meant the British obtaining ‘ownership’ of the lands that were in the agreement, an idea that Indigenous peoples could not comprehend because Indigenous ways of thinking meant that land was no different than a human being, animal, or plant – it has its own life force that is to be respected and sustained. Additionally, the British approached these agreements as if the Indigenous nations were making themselves subjects to the British while many Indigenous nations, including the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, looked at them as a component of their alliance and relationship established as equal nations under the Wampums of Niagara. Nonetheless, these agreements were instrumental in allowing the movement of the ancestors of many Canadians into Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory and continue to allow such movement of people into these lands today. To further understand these purchases, some that are specific to the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, and also the Michi Saagiig of Rice Lake/Pamitaashkodeyong/Hiawatha First Nation, should be highlighted.

## What Are Some Examples of Purchases:

There are many different purchases and agreements that relate to the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and their traditional territory. In relation to the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg at Rice Lake, the three examples below should assist with understanding the overall points and confusion that has also related to many of the Upper Canada Agreements. The Crawford’s Purchase, the Johnson-Butler Purchase, and the Rice Lake Purchase will be highlighted not only



because of their direct relation to the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg of Rice Lake but also the connection to the territory that Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg of Rice Lake, and other Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg frequented, hunted, harvested, and utilized.

### **Crawford's Purchase:**

In October of 1783, the British, represented by Captain William Crawford, sought an agreement from the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg who utilized and were stewards of much of what is called southeastern Ontario today. The specific land it reflected was located on the north shore of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, including the cities and towns of Cornwall, Morrisburg, Brockville, Kingston, Napanee, Belleville, and Trenton to name a few, and up along the south side of the Ottawa River just east of the town of Hawksbury and west of the city of Ottawa. The towns of Kemptville, Smith Falls, Tweed, Verona, and Madoc also fall into this area of territory the British sought to purchase. Refer to the government of Ontario's [Map of Ontario Treatises and Reserves](#)<sup>18</sup> for more.

The descendants of a majority of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg who are listed as signing this agreement are from the current community of Alderville, located on the south shore of Rice Lake. This purchase was in order to secure territory and land for Loyalists who needed to leave the Thirteen Colonies as well as for Kanien'kéha:ka (Mohawk) who settled in what is today called the community of Tyendinaga. It was also considered a way to make sure the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg who traditionally situated themselves in the area that Kingston is today would relocate to other areas of their territory. Questions regarding the full integrity of the purchase continue to this day – especially because the idea of ownership of land and territory that Europeans, such as the British, believed in was not what the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg believed. Much oral history and documentation since the Crawford's Purchase reflect that the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg approached this agreement as one of sharing and thus still having access to their traditional territories, hunting grounds, and harvesting grounds.

### **Johnson-Butler Purchase:**

Prior to 1788, the British had negotiated the Crawford's Purchase and believed, in 1787, that they had also negotiated the first Toronto Purchase. Although there were many issues with the Toronto Purchase of 1787, such as no written documentation of it, the British sought to link the two areas of territory it believed it owned by seeking the remainder of the territory in between them. Thus, Sir John Johnson and Colonel John Butler, on behalf of the British Crown, sought more territory from the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and the Chippewa'ag Nishnaabeg –

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/map-ontario-treaties-and-reserves#limitations>



specifically those who utilized and cared for the territory on the north shore of Lake Ontario that had not yet been signed into an agreement. The ‘purchase’ area stretched along the north shore of Lake Ontario from where the Crawford’s Purchase ended to where the Toronto Purchase of 1787 supposedly began. The extent of how far north it went has been debated as the Johnson-Butler Purchase is also nicknamed the Gunshot Treaty.

The reasoning for this nickname is because the marking for how far north from the shoreline the treaty included depended on how far a gunshot could be heard. Maps tend to claim that because of this, the Johnson-Butler Purchase thus goes as far north as the south shore of Rice Lake and then, for some reason just north of present-day Oshawa, cuts further north up to the south shores of Lake Simcoe. The territory in question is territory where the current cities and towns of Brighton, Cobourg, Port Hope, Hastings, Bewdley, Bowmanville, Oshawa, Whitby, Ajax, Pickering, Markham, Port Perry, and Uxbridge, to name a few, are situated today. Refer to the government of Ontario’s [Map of Ontario Treaties and Reserves](#)<sup>19</sup> for more.

This purchase, like that of the Crawford’s Purchase, has been controversial. The agreement was largely undocumented and was a blank deed; little understanding or explanation of the Johnson-Butler Purchase’s boundaries existed or was given; and it is unclear whether the gifts and payment reflect the longstanding alliance the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and Chippewa’ag Nishnaabeg had with the British rather than simply giving ownership to the British over something that Nishnaabeg believed was a living entity. Despite the controversy, the agreement allowed for more people to move into the area and continues to allow for non-Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and non-Chippewa’ag Nishnaabeg to call this area home.

### **Rice Lake Purchase:**

By 1818, several agreements had allowed for the movement of non-Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and Non Chippewa’ag Nishnaabeg into much of what is called southern Ontario today. British representatives began at that time to pursue territory and land in areas such as Peterborough County. On November 5 1818, what is referred to as the Rice Lake Purchase was finalized between Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg representatives, Chippewa’ag Nishnaabeg representatives, and British Crown representatives, including William Clause, William Hands, and William Gruet. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg representatives included Buckquaquet, Pishikinse, Cahgahkishinse, as well as Pahtosh. Pahtosh was the Head Gimaa (leader) of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg at Rice Lake and his namesake continues to this day with his descendants who go by the last name ‘Paudash.’ Additionally, the Rice Lake Purchase refers to an agreement in relation

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/map-ontario-treaties-and-reserves#limitations>



to an area of territory that follows the northern borders of the Crawford's Purchase, Johnson-Butler Purchase, as well as Rice Lake, the eastern shores of Lake Simcoe, the Robinson-Huron Treaty area to the north, as well as the Rideau Purchase to its east. Some of the cities and towns included in the 1,951,000 acres this area includes are Gravenhurst, Havelock, Lakefield, Bobcaygen, Lindsay, Omemee, Millbrook, Kawartha Lakes, and Peterborough. Refer to the government of Ontario's [Map of Ontario Treatises and Reserves](#)<sup>20</sup> for more.

The area that relates to the Rice Lake Purchase also includes the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg communities of Pamitaashkodeyong (Hiawatha First Nation), Oshkigomog (Curve Lake First Nation), Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nations, as well as the Chippewa'ag Nishnaabeg Community of Rama (Chippewas of Rama First Nation). Alongside these communities, the territory also was not only considered important for farming but also for use of waterways for travelling inland but also from Lake Ontario to Lake Huron. The agreement was to recognize hunting, fishing, and harvesting rights for Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and Chippewa'ag Nishnaabeg as well as to allow for coexistence with those who would look to move on to the territory. Additionally, the agreement would allow for the development of an important water artery we use to this day for travelling: The Trent Severn Waterway. Like the other purchases mentioned, controversy existed in relation to what was fully agreed to in the Rice Lake Purchase and, like other agreements and purchases, continue to face questions and debate about what it fully entailed. Such controversy with the Rice Lake Purchase, and others it bordered, would contribute to a newer 'treaty' that both the province of Ontario and the federal government of Canada would pursue in 1923.

## What Are the Williams Treaties?

In 1923, the federal government of Canada and the province of Ontario announced plans for a new treaty to encompass much of the territory that related to the Rice Lake Purchase, the Johnson-Butler Purchase, as well as sections of other purchases in the region. Refer to the government of Ontario's [Map of Ontario Treatises and Reserves](#)<sup>21</sup> for more. Concerns arose from Canadian and Ontario officials about the title of the land in relation to these purchases and thus the potential impact on the economy, municipalities, and people who now also called this area home. In turn, Canada and the province of Ontario approached Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and Chippewa'ag communities in the territory that was of concern and laid out, utilizing a top-down approach in its design, what would become known as the Williams Treaties. These two treaties, named after Canada's Treaty Commissioner Angus Seymour

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/map-ontario-treaties-and-reserves#limitations>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Williams, encompassed 52,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The Williams Treaties were signed on October 31 1923, specifically for the Chippewa'ag Nishnaabeg communities of Georgina Island, Beausoleil, and Rama, and November 15 1923, specifically for the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg communities of Scugog Island, Pamitaashkodeyong, Oshkigomog, and Alderville.

Nishnaabeg people had many concerns about the Williams Treaties. The nature and provisions of the Williams Treaties had already been determined by the governments before presenting them to the Chippewa'ag Nishnaabeg and Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, who felt that they had no role in negotiating the treaties but were forced to sign. Additionally, the Williams Treaties claimed that the Chippewa'ag Nishnaabeg and Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg surrendered their inherent rights to fishing, hunting, and harvesting in their traditional territories, a claim that both Chippewa'ag Nishnaabeg and Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg have consistently denied agreeing to since 1923. Additional issues and disagreement over the wording and what the Williams Treaties fully entailed can be easily found and are documented – Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and Chippewa'ag Nishnaabeg felt that while they and their descendants were continuously denied the ability to utilize the territory that had consistently been utilized, and cared for, by their ancestors who had come before them, settler Canadians were granted the ability to further progress and utilize these lands.

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and Chippewa'ag Nishnaabeg continued to push both the province of Ontario and Canada on the grievances they had with the Williams Treaties and also with segments of the Treaties that they never agreed to. Following decades of pushback and legal actions from the 1970s on, some of the issues and discrepancies from the Williams Treaties were ended in 2018, with the finalizing of an agreement that not only compensated those Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and Chippewa'ag Communities, and their citizens, who had not been treated fairly in 1923 but also confirmed the inherent right to hunting, fishing, and harvesting for them in their territories. Refer to the [Williams Treaties and the 2018 Agreement](#),<sup>22</sup> for further research.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://williamstreatiesfirstnations.ca/>

# The Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Today

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## **Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Communities Today:**

Currently, the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg have six communities that are recognized by the Canadian state. On the western side of the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg is the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, located near the town of Hagersville, Ontario. In the northern section of the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, near the town of Blind River and along the Mississaugi River and shores of Bearhead Lake and Chiblow Lake, is the community of Mississwezahging (Mississauga First Nation). Further south, and deep in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory, is the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, located near the town of Port Perry and Scugog Lake. Near the town of Lakefield, is a fourth community: Oshkigomog (Mississaugas of Mud Lake or also known as Curve Lake First Nation), which is located on a peninsula between Chemong and Buckhorn Lakes. Lastly, on the south shore of Rice Lake, near the town of Roseneath and north of Cobourg, one will find Alderville First Nation – while on the north side of Rice Lake, Pamitaaskodeyong (Mississaugas of Rice Lake or also known as Hiawatha First Nation) continues to stand since its formation as a permanent village in the 1820s.

All six communities have continued to grow and exist despite attempts to erase them and to assimilate them into the Canadian state. All six have a long history in their current locations as well as throughout the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. Today, citizens of these communities reside not only throughout their traditional territory, and in the many Canadian towns and cities that now exist within, but also throughout territory that Indigenous share with Canada as well as around the world. Thus, it is safe to say and be reminded that the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg continue to exist – that they are still here!

## **We Are Still Here: The Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Nation:**

The Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, from before contact and through the unilateral imposition of the Canadian state, have continued to remind other Indigenous nations, Settlers, and Canadians that they not only exist but that they are a nation. Despite laws enacted through the Indian Act, and trying to deconstruct the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and the Anishinaabeg Confederacy and alliances, the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg have utilized methods that could assist with protecting the six communities, coming together with other First Nations communities, as

well as returning together as the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg nation itself. All six communities are involved with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), an organization that assists with lobbying for policy options in relation to the Canadian state. Alongside the AFN, they also are members of the AFN's regional organization: Chiefs of Ontario (COO), which assists with interaction and discussion with the AFN and Canadian state and also in relation to the province of Ontario. Furthermore, each community may interact with regional organizations that help represent First Nations communities within territory shared with the province of Ontario.

In recent times the six Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg communities have also been utilizing the power they hold by coming together as the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg nation themselves. The Band system of Chief and Councils have come together and met to discuss policies and plans proposed by organizations like AFN but have also, since the early part of the 2010s, begun meeting together as a nation outside of the construct of those political organizations that have been mentioned. In exploring a further and interwoven relationship of the six Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg communities, a Relationship Accord was signed on October 29, 2016. The signing of the accord "represented an agreement to work in a collaborative and inclusive way on a range of agreed-upon issues and initiatives of common interest or concern."<sup>23</sup> Since 2016, the six Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg communities have been doing just that with work and exploratory committees on governance, relations with the Canadian state, language revitalization, economic development, justice, and research. Furthermore, the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg nation and its relationship accord can be seen by the representation of all six communities in relation to the visitation of the artifacts we are learning about today.

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<sup>23</sup> Mississauga Nation, "History," *Mississauga Nation* (Accessed: March 20, 2023), <https://www.mississauganation.com/history.html>.

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