



## Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones

### AVA History Fact Sheet No. 1: Wampum Belts

- Among Anishinabeg and Iroquoian-speaking (Haudenosaunee) groups east of the Great Lakes shell wampum belts were the primary Aboriginal device by which particular alliances and treaty relationships were recalled.
- Some wampum belts such as the Hiawatha Belt refer to pre-Contact political accords between indigenous First Nations, or post-Contact, such as the Two Row Wampum, between these First Nations and the earliest European newcomers and their colonial successors.
- The Covenant Chain Wampum Belt and the Two Row Wampum Belt record the political agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the British Crown for harmonious relations during peace and military alliance during war.
- Even if British colonial governments or subsequent Canadian governments were unwilling or unable to do so, many Aboriginal groups continued to use their traditional knowledge of wampum belt symbolism to recall their most sacred agreements with non-Aboriginal governments.
- Certain recurring symbols or designs serve as distinguishing features in interpreting or “reading” wampum belts. The four most powerful designs are those symbolizing the Fire, the Path, the Chain and the Prop.
- The Fire is usually hexagonal or circular in shape and represents the territory or the seat of government of a specific First Nation.
- The Path often appears as a jagged or serrated line like a bolt of lightning and represents the idea of movement, commerce, exchange or travel between nations.
- The Chain is most often depicted as a straight horizontal line or sometimes as a pair of parallel lines and represents mutual aid between sovereign nations: military aid during war and trading partnerships during peace.
- The Prop most often appears as a diagonal line and represents the symbolic extension of the longhouse or other communal dwelling to accommodate the presence of newcomers or newly admitted nations into pre-existing alliances.
- During the First World War a group of Haudenosaunee clanmothers from the Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve sent a petition including photographs of the Two Row Wampum and the Covenant Chain Wampum to King George the Fifth in England demanding that he release underage Six Nations soldiers from the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

(Compiled by AVA member John Moses, Six Nations of the Grand River, from various sources)

**“Lest We Forget”**