

Collaboration and Friendship: Building Respectful Relationships with Indigenous Communities

Presentation for the
National Trust for Canada
October 23, 2015



An agency of the Government of Ontario



Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

The Ontario Heritage Trust



The Ontario Heritage Trust – the province's heritage agency – is dedicated to identifying, protecting, renewing and promoting Ontario's rich and diverse cultural and natural heritage that has influenced and continues to shape our society for the benefit of present and future generations.



Working with Aboriginal Communities

OHT is uniquely positioned to work with Ontario ministries, First Nations and Métis communities to:

- Tell the stories
- Recognize those involved in protecting and preserving cultural spaces and traditions
- Protect and conserve land
- Facilitate resolution of issues like archaeology and re-interment of human remains

OHT, First Nations and Métis communities generally share common values and objectives regarding land conservation, sustainability and environmental protection

What are we trying to do?

The Ontario Heritage Trust is working to create:

- A different discussion of the past:
 - Challenge and re-examine traditional interpretations of the past
 - Recognize that Canada's history began thousands of years ago
 - Acknowledge / celebrate the diverse accomplishments of indigenous peoples prior to and since the arrival of the Europeans
 - Provide a more comprehensive, inclusive and objective treatment of human history, values and beliefs
- Collaborations and partnerships:
 - that recognize the different perspectives and connections the First Nation and Métis peoples bring to the history and preservation of the planet
 - that respect their connection to their ancestors
 - that tell our collective stories

How are we doing this?

- Protecting sacred and culturally significant places;
- Preserving intangible heritage (eg. Language and traditional knowledge);
- Recognizing the contributions and accomplishments; and
- Providing opportunities to share and present new perspectives and stories.

Protecting sacred sites



Nochemowenaing

Protecting sacred sites

Nochemowenaing

Common Objectives:

- Secure the site for future generations
- Protect the site and area from development
- Recognize the site's sacred value and its heritage value
- Protect this significant archaeological site and its human burials, in situ
- Identify, protect and restore the natural heritage values of the land
- Ensure the site is accessible for continuing cultural use by Anishnabek peoples
- Encourage the intangible values (name, annual / seasonal ceremonies)



Protecting sacred sites



Nochemowenaing

Co-management Agreement signed in 2011

Working together to manage the site:

- The Ontario Heritage Trust responsible for costs related to the maintenance of the site (e.g. securing the site and signage).
- The Chippewas of Nawash monitor the site.
- The Chippewas of Nawash have access to the site for ceremonial purposes/activities.
- The burials are protected in situ.
- Archaeological partnership.
- Planning for selective landscape restoration.

Protecting sacred sites



Thonnakona

Reburial of Human Remains

Thonnakona: Kleinburg Ossuary

- The remains of a late 16th century ossuary, located on an Ontario Heritage Trust-owned property, were excavated in 1970 by the University of Toronto
- Known as the Kleinburg Ossuary, it included the remains of 561 individuals and associated funerary objects
- The ossuary is culturally affiliated with the Huron- Wendat / Huron-Wyandotte and its original location is regarded as a sacred place
- In September 2010 The Huron- Wendat First Nation requested the re-interment of the Kleinburg Ossuary at its original site
- OHT, UofT and the Huron-Wendat worked cooperatively together to that end
- OHT also facilitated the re-interment of ancestors from 12 additional Huron-Wendat communities that were in the care of UofT



Reburial of Human Remains - Policy

In 2010 the Ontario Heritage Trust's Board of Directors approved a Policy Statement for the Re-interment of Human Remains and Associated Funerary Objects on Ontario Heritage Trust Owned Property:

“Human remains may exist on and, in some instances in the past, have been removed during archaeological excavations from the lands and under the waters owned by the Ontario Heritage Trust. All human remains shall be treated with respect and dignity. The Ontario Heritage Trust will steward and protect such remains and any funerary objects that have been removed according to high archaeological and conservation standards until arrangements for re-interment can be scheduled.”

It is the Ontario Heritage Trust's policy to respect the religious, spiritual and cultural requirements of Aboriginal peoples, descendant groups and next of kin individuals.

Reburial of Human Remains

Thonnakona: Kleinburg Ossuary

Common Objectives included:

- recognize the cultural and spiritual sensitivity of the Collection
 - recognize the sacred value of the Thonnakona Ossuary
 - re-inter the ancestors as close as possible to the original ossuary location
 - ensure access to the Thonnakona Ossuary by the Huron-Wendat Nation for spiritual, cultural or traditional use reasons
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- Reburial and associated ceremonies – 2013
 - 1760 individuals were re-interred – largest reburial undertaken in North America
 - The new ossuary named “Thonnakona” after the Grand Chief of the St. Lawrence Huron in 1534

OHT-HWN – Our agreement

“In a spirit of collaboration and reconciliation the parties agree to respectfully rebury on the Glassco property the University of Toronto and Ontario Heritage Trust collections of human remains associated with the Huron-Wendat Nation. The project will include the preparation of the human remains, preparation and excavation of the reburial site, transportation of the human remains to the reburial site, reburying of the human remains and commemoration of the site.”

Protecting sacred sites



Konrad Sioui, Grand Chief, Huron-Wendat Nation

Preserving intangible heritage

- Recognize the contributions of indigenous peoples
- Integrate indigenous history and heritage values into the narrative
- Identify, safeguard and promote intangible cultural heritage, including:
 - oral traditions; expressions; language
 - performing arts – e.g., music, dance or theatre
 - social practices; rituals/ceremonies and festive events
 - knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
 - traditional craftsmanship

Battle of Moraviantown



Chief Francis Pegahmagabow



Métis Nation of Ontario Canoe Expedition



Providing opportunities to share perspectives and stories

- Celebrate diversity of experiences, customs and perspectives of different peoples and different places
- Respect the values of the aboriginal community
- Bring together the tangible heritage of place and object with the intangibles of story, memory and tradition
- Link family stories with broader history
- Choose sites of historic and modern meaning

Hudson's Bay Company Staff House



Hudson's Bay Company Staff House

- Partners: OHT, Moose Cree First Nation, Moose River Heritage and Hospitality Association
- Objectives include:
 - to expand the themes, stories and perspectives portrayed and interpreted at the HBC sites, including those of the Cree people and in their voices
 - to create a more balanced, respectful narrative and more engaging, authentic visitor experience

Champlain 1615



Champlain 1615

- Objectives: Telling the story of Champlain from a variety of perspectives, including the voices and languages of Indigenous peoples in the telling.
- Both the plaque text and the background paper were reviewed by eminent North American historians, archaeologists and historical geographers
- Received input from, the Huron Wendat Nation, the Curve Lake First Nation, the Saugeen First Nation and the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn First Nation
- Plaque is being created in French, English and four Indigenous languages
- On-line resource - opens a discussion about Champlain's legacy

Champlain 1615 – Perspectives

- Seek out an inclusive and diverse representation of voices, interpretations and understandings
- Present a balanced narrative
- We asked 5 questions:
 - What is the legacy of Samuel de Champlain's 1615 visit to Ontario?
 - What aspects of the Champlain story are not well understood?
 - What were the impacts of Champlain's endeavours in North America for the Francophone and Indigenous peoples?
 - What did the Indigenous Peoples of Ontario contribute to Champlain, the settlement in New France and the culture of Europe?
 - Do you have any other comments or perspectives to share on this subject?

Champlain 1615 – Perspectives

Chief Vernon Roote, Saugeen First Nation on Champlain:

We knew that in order for him [Champlain] to reach Georgian Bay, he would have to enter through the access point at the mouth of the French River. So the Anishnaabe people assembled 300 warriors to meet him there, just in case he and his people were going to be up to no good.

Champlain writes about what happened when he met the Anishnaabe people for the first time. “What are you guys doing here?” he asked.

The Anishnaabe warriors answered, “Picking blueberries.” It wouldn’t be the last time that Europeans failed to understand Anishnaabe humour.

What have we learned?

- Show up
- Listen
- Be respectful, honest, patient
- Build personal friendships that can outlast and transcend the project
- Find the cultural, conservation and/or sustainability connections
- Articulate common objectives and build agreement from there
- Find out how that community makes decisions and respect their process
- Find solutions that are site-specific, community-specific, issue-specific
- We can't resolve all of the issues – we can provide opportunities for meaningful public dialogue



What have we learned?

- Learn about and respect the history and culture of the specific community you are working with.
- Recognize the diversity of cultures, histories and traditions and the diversity of perspectives within the aboriginal community
- Listen to perspectives, interests and priorities - may have a different worldview than you do
- Connection with the land has strong, meaningful roots in the distant past
- Respect the relationship with the land, water and wildlife
- Respect cultural values, beliefs and unique identities, including cultural ceremonies and rites
- Create real partnerships that preserve the land, carry forward the stories, and sustain the people of today

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