

# **TIOHTIÀ:KE PROJECT - MOHAWK COUNCIL OF KAHNAWÀ:KE**

## **REPORT ON ORAL TRADITIONS RESEARCH**

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### **Background**

The Tiohtia:ke Project is a collaboration between the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke, the Université de Montréal and the Pointe-à-Callière museum to increase knowledge on the Indigenous presence in the Montreal region, the greater St-Lawrence Valley and the Adirondacks (Kanièn:ke). The project aims to synthesize and consolidate existing research and to compile archaeological evidence and oral histories that can be used to help defend Kahnawà:ke's rights and jurisdiction. The Tiohtia:ke Project is intended to advance of knowledge with respect to the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka people in relation to Quebec and other jurisdictions.

Phase One of the Project is currently underway and focuses on Onkwehonwe presence and occupation in the period between 1000 to 1760 of our current era. The oral history component of the research was conducted during summer and fall of 2020, and involved attempting to locate, collect and analyze stories and other forms of knowledge Kahnawakero:non have about our people's presence and occupation in this region during the pre-contact period through 1760.

Kahnawà:ke's involvement in the Project is overseen by Chief Ross Montour and is coordinated by a team comprised of Trina C. Diabo, Christine Zachary-Deom and Gaetan Nolet of the MCK. Gerald Taiaiake Alfred was the manager of the oral history component of the research, and he was assisted by Brandon Montour. Two preeminent scholars in the field, Roland Viau of the University of Montreal and Pierre Trudel of the University of Quebec at Montreal, provided research services in support of the Project's objectives in regard to oral histories.

The Project Manager, through community outreach and existing networks, identified people in the community who have information, or knew of someone with information, that would help advance knowledge about our people's presence on Tiohtia:ke and in the wider region. Certain elders were identified as potential sources of information, and they were interviewed. As well, Brandon Montour completed a scan of written materials located in Kahnawà:ke (archival and library books) and the two above mentioned scholars prepared reports on based on written materials in the scholarly literature and other archival locations that contain references to oral traditions relevant to this issue.

Specifically, the research conducted as part of the investigation into Kahnawà:ke's existent oral traditions about Tiohtià:ke and the pre and early contact period included personal interviews with five elders: Billy Two Rivers, Joe McGregor, Wahiakeron Gilbert, Winston Standup, and Joe Canadian, and commissioned research papers by two eminent Quebecois scholars who are recognized experts in the field: *What is Oral History? A Contribution to the Definition of the Concept for the Tiohtià:ke Project (submitted in French as Qu'est-ce que la tradition orale? Contribution à une définition du concept pour le Projet Tiohtià:ke)* by Pierre Trudel; and, an *Inventory of Historical Sources Relating to the Iroquoian Presence In The St. Lawrence Valley Between 1534 And 1800* (submitted in French as *Inventaire des sources historiques relatives à la présence iroquoise dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent entre 1534 et 1800*) by Roland Viau.

The reports and transcripts from the research conducted are appended to this report.

## **Findings of the Research**

Pierre Trudel's paper provided an in-depth discussion on the nature of oral history and provided a sound frame for considering oral history in relation to other forms of knowledge, with specific reference to the significance of oral histories in Indigenous cultural contexts. The paper was divided into seven sections, tracing the debates surrounding oral history as a concept and exploring the field of oral history as a method and practice of recording knowledge. Specifically, Trudel provided a discussion of: the concept of oral tradition; the categories of oral tradition; a discussion of the antiquity of oral tradition accounts; history, oral history and oral tradition; oral tradition and education; territory and oral tradition; and, elders in oral tradition.

After discussing these topics, Trudel concluded his paper by offering several insightful recommendations specific to the ongoing work of the Project:

1. Inventory elements of the Mohawk oral tradition in archives and anthropological studies.
2. Collect toponyms in Kahnawà:ke and in the Montreal region and identify the meaning of these toponyms and their associated stories.
3. Draw up a portrait of the diversity of Mohawk stories.
4. Explore links between patterns on archaeological artefacts and elements of oral tradition.

5. Collect stories from the elders and from traditionalists who hold oral tradition.
6. Consult the Kanien'keháka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa.
7. Create events where Mohawks can share stories in front of an audience, in a fun context.
8. Collect stories about the Mohawks, or transmitted by the Mohawks, from non-native elders whose families have been established in the region for several generations.

Roland Viau's paper consisted of an inventory of references to relevant oral traditions in the existing scholarly literature and in archival materials that he was able to access – the research was thorough in spite of the limitations imposed by pandemic restrictions during the research timeframe. The paper is a significant effort and presents a valuable resource for this Project and for future work on Kanien'keháka history. The points presented by Viau directly relating to the Project's aims are listed below (full citations and references are included in detail in Viau's paper).

“After the Feste [August 15, 1642] we visited the great woods which cover this Isle [island of Montreal]; and estans bring to the mountain from which it takes its name, two of the principal Indians of the troupe, who stopped on the summit, told us that they were of the nation of those who had formerly inhabited this Isle; then stretching out their hands towards the hills which are to the east and to the south of the mountain: There, they said, the places where there were Towns filled with very great numbers of Indians; the Hurons, who at that time were our enemies, drove our ancestors out of this region, some withdrew to the land of the Abanaquois [Abenakis], others to the land of the Hiroquois, and a part to the Hurons themselves, uniting with them, and this is how this Isle became deserted.” (1642, Jérôme Lalement, *The Jesuit Relations*)

“On the evening of the same day [August 15, 1642] M. de Maisonneuve [Paul Chomedey] wanted to visit the Mountain, which gave the name to Isle, & two old Indians, who accompanied him there, having made him go up to the top, said to him that they were of the Nation, which had formerly inhabited this Country. "We were," they added, "in great number, & all the Hills, which you see in the South and in the East, were populated. The Hurons chased away our Ancestors, some of whom took refuge among the Abenakis, others withdrew to the Iroquois Townships, a few remained with our Victors ". The Governor [Charles Huault de Montmagny] begged them to warn their Brothers to meet in their old possessions, that they would lack nothing, and that they would be in insurance against anyone who tried to worry them. They promised to do whatever was in their

hands for it; but they apparently couldn't manage to piece together the wreckage of this scattered Nation, which could well be that of the Iroquet, which I wrote about in my Journal." (1642/1744, Jesuit historian, Charlevoix essentially uses the text of the Relation of 1642 written by Jérôme Lalemant, François-Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle-France*)

"An elderly man may be 80. years old, has retired to Montreal: Voicy, he said, my country, my mother told me that when they were the Hurons who made war with us, they drove us from this Isle, for I want to be buried there with my ancestors." (1646, Paul Ragueneau in *The Jesuit Relations*).

"The Onontchataronons, whose ancestors once inhabited the Island of Montreal, and who seem to have some desire to take it back for their country, stood firm, and following their example, the Mata8chkarini8ek." (1646, Paul Regueneau, *The Jesuit Relations*)

"The Iroquoits after being putt out of that country of Quebecq, the Hurrans and Algonquins made themselves masters in it; that is to say, they went up above monmorency [Montmorency River] after that they left the place of their wintering, wth was over against Tadousac, att the height of the Chaudiere (so called in French), and after many years they returned to live att the gape of the their lake [Huron], wch is 200 Leagues long & 50 or 60 leagues large." (1654, P.E. Radisson in the *Voyages of Peter Esprit Radisson*)

"The Iroquois chomped on their brains, and no longer wanting to trust the Algonkins, they returned the following Spring to their first lands which were around Montreal, and along the river, up to Lake Frontenac [Ontario]." (1702, Clause Charles Bacqueville de La Potherie, *Histoire de l'Amérique septentrionale*)

"The country of the Irroquois was formerly Montreal, and the three Rivers. They had as neighbors the Algonkins who lived along the Outaoüas river, at Nepissing, in the François river, and between it and Taronto [Toronto]." (Nicolas Perrot, *Mœurs, coutumes et religion des Sauvages de l'Amérique septentrionale*)

"The Iroquois Agniés [Kanienke'haka] assure that they wandered for a long time under the leadership of a woman named Gaihonariosk: this woman took them for a walk in all the north of America, she made them pass from the place where the city of Quebec is located. ; but having found these countries too unequal, and perhaps too inconvenient because of the cold, she finally stopped at Agnié [valley of the Mohawk], whose climate appeared to her to be more temperate and the land more suitable for cultivation; she then distributed these lands to work on them and thus founded a colony which has been

maintained ever since.” (1712-17, Jean-Francois Lafitau, *Mœurs des sauvages américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps*)

“They [the pubescent girls] lived in community, as far as I can judge by the Relation made by Jaques Cartier \*, who says he saw at the Inhabitants of Hochelaga \*, public huts intended for young girls, that they were put there as soon as they were old enough to be provided, and which were full, as are the schools in Europe \*, where children are sent to be instructed. These inhabitants were a Nation of the Iroquois & Huron Languages, established in the Island of Montreal \*.” (1738, Claude Le Beau, in *Aventures du sieur C. Le Beau, avocat en parlement. Voyage curieux et nouveau parmi les Sauvages de l’Amérique septentrionale*)

“In the ancient days the Great Island [America] appeared upon the big waters, the earth brought forth trees, herbs, vegetables, & c. The creation of the land animals: the Eagwehoeve [Native] people were too created and resided in the north regions, and after a time some of the people become giants and committed outrages upon the inhabitants, & c. After many years a body of Eagwehoeve people encamped on the bank of a majestic stream, and was name Kanawage\*, now St.Lawrence. After a long time a number of foreign people sailed from a port unknown; but unfortunately before reached their destination the winds drove them contrary; at length their ship wrecked somewhere on the southern part of the Great Island, and many of the crews perished; a few active persons were saved; they obtained some implements, and each of them was covered with a leather bag, the big hawks carried them on the summit of a mountain and remained there but a short time the hawks seemed threaten them, and were compelled to leave the mountain. They immediately selected a place for residence and built a small fortification in order to provide against the attacks of furious beasts; if there should be any made. After many years the foreign became numerous, and extended their settlements; but afterwards they were destroyed by monsters that overrun the country. About this time the Eagwehoeve people inhabited on the riverKanawage or St. Lawrence; but they could not enjoy tranquility, as they were invaded by giants called Ronnongwetowanca, who came from the north and inhabited considerably; but their mode of attack was silly, and never dared to precipitate themselves upon the enemy without prospect of success; especially they took advantage when the warriors were absent from the town. After plundering the people’s houses and making captives those were found, and hastily retreat to their residence in the north.” (1825, David Cusick, *Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations*)

Teontiakon (“canal”) is the old name of Montreal, and by abbreviation is now spoken as: Tiotiake. (1882, Jean-André Cuoq, *Lexique de la langue iroquoise avec Notes et Appendices*)

The oral history interviews with Kahnawà:ke elders conducted for the project were done by both the Project Manager and Brandon Montour. They included five people who were identified in a scan of knowledge holders and in focused conversations with various community thought leaders as individuals who may hold knowledge about the history and culture of the community, especially in terms of stories or passed-down knowledge relating to the aims of the Project.

Unfortunately, very little of relevance to the specific aims of the Project was shared in the oral history interviews. Participants shared a wealth of knowledge about the community's history and obviously had many stories to tell about Kahnawà:ke, but these were almost exclusively relating to the era beginning with the founding of the community in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and continuing through to the contemporary period, and to various aspects of our culture and language. Only one participant, Billy Two Rivers, shared stories with information related to the aims of the Project. These aspects of his stories are capsulized below:

On the Mohawk name for the island of Montreal:

*Tiotiake is just a spot that we named where the groups broke up and went back to their winter places. This was a place where people came for the summer to recoup their losses, come back for young brides and the same thing in Akwesasne.*

On Mohawks' relationship with the Huron/Wendat people:

*They're not the Hurons, they're our people. When our people came over here, they always traveled along the shoreline. They didn't go in the middle of the lake. When they went west for the beaver, they didn't go to the middle of the lake, they followed the water ways all the way up to Alberta. That's the connection between that. The Huron is a name given to our people by the white man. There are different kinds of stories, even the Huron have a story about how they are Hurons and different other people, so that's all Hurons. We secured our territory by placing people in safety, so if we were on the lake on the north side, we didn't want to be attacked by the Ojibwa or any other nation. We had our people living on that side of the lake.*

On the question of the "St. Lawrence Iroquoians" and the inhabitants of "Hochelaga":

*No, there's no such thing. It's the same thing as the northern Mohawks or Laurentian Iroquois. Our people were all Iroquois and they traded and traveled and had communities, maybe settled just in that part where the Iroquois were living. They were living there, and they prove it by pots and pottery etc. they were just territorial areas that we occupied. When you look at the oral tradition, it tells you a lot about how things happened before the European came.*

*What do you think Cartier saw when he was there? They describe it, there was a village and all that stuff. What was he looking at? Was it a summer village? Was it like you say, they were there for the summer? I forget when he got there, I think it was in October.*

*People from our community would come there for the summer, but we had a permanent group there because we had clans, 3 clans, and the 3 clans, we lived together but we lived apart. The turtle clan lived down in the area of Kentake, La Prairie area. That was the farmland. That was where it was fertile. We had the okwari on the island of Montreal. Within the island, they lived there all the time, the bear clan. The wolf clan is around the Chateauguay River. People don't realize that what they had is the various places that we had. In order to understand this area, and you begin to understand Montreal and what it was for, what they saw. That's why they called it that. You go back to where the confederacy bestows the responsibility of the eastern door to us, not to the white man. When we came in here, we brought peace and we brought trade. We didn't come here and war our way into this country. We got good with the Algonquin people by trading with them. They gave us meat and we gave them vegetables, and we traded. People objected that it was those ways. Those people that lived in the old ways that wanted to stay Algonquin or whatever people were here, they objected to us moving here so we had to guard our points which was given to us by the confederacy as being the eastern door.*

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This research effort has demonstrated that there is little in the way of oral history remaining in the community related to the pre-contact and early-contact eras overall or specifically focused on the Montreal region. Though this is not surprising, and even to be expected, given the timespan involved and the means of knowledge transfer used in our culture before literacy was introduced, it does point to the need for approaches to researching these questions beyond simply looking for stories in the literature and among elders.

Reflecting on the recommendations of Pierre Trudel, and considering the available source materials available to be brought to bear on the questions at the centre of the Project's research agenda, I recommend the following with respect to further oral history research:

1. Further exploration and expansion of Mohawk oral histories should be conducted using visual cues such as artefacts in the archeological record and place naming exercises; and,
2. Research among non-indigenous knowledge holders in the Montreal region should be conducted to gather stories about Mohawk people and the Project's research questions.