

A Carrying Place.

The Indigenous History of Oshawa

This project was created with the assistance of Brian Beaver, Consultant, Alderville First Nation.

Indigenous peoples have called this land home for thousands of years. However, like the rest of Turtle Island (North America), the history of Oshawa has been told solely from the settler perspective. The voices of the distinct Indigenous nations that have stewarded this land have been largely omitted. This exhibit will focus on the earliest inhabitants, the First Nations.

Most First Nations living in Ontario today fall under 2 broad language groups:

Iroquoian

Algonquian

Within these large groups are unique nations, histories, and cultures. In Oshawa, first the ancestral Wendat (Iroquoian) and later the Mississauga/Anishnaabeg (Algonquian) established settlements.

1400-1450 C. E. The Ancestral Wendat

The territory of the Ancestral Wendat is thought to have extended along the north shore of Lake Ontario from the Rouge River to Prince Edward County. Based on artifacts found at two separate Oshawa sites, it is estimated that the span of their presence in this area falls within the Late Iroquoian period (1400 – 1450 C. E.), but may have begun in the late 1300s.

The Ancestral Wendat or Ouendat, meaning “island dwellers,” were called Huron by the French, the first Europeans to travel to this area. They were agriculturalists and often established villages that stood on a slight rise, adjacent to a permanent water supply and close to good farming soils. Every 10 to 15 years, when soils and firewood were exhausted, the community would relocate.

Digging Into the Past

Grandview Site

In 1992, artifacts were unearthed during preparation for a subdivision southwest of the intersection of Taunton Road and Grandview Street, near Harmony Creek. The salvage excavation by Archaeological Services Inc. uncovered the remains of a large village.

Among the artifacts uncovered were:



Based on these artifacts, it seems this community came here from around Duffins Creek and the Rouge River watershed and later moved to a new settlement at the MacLeod site.

MacLeod Site

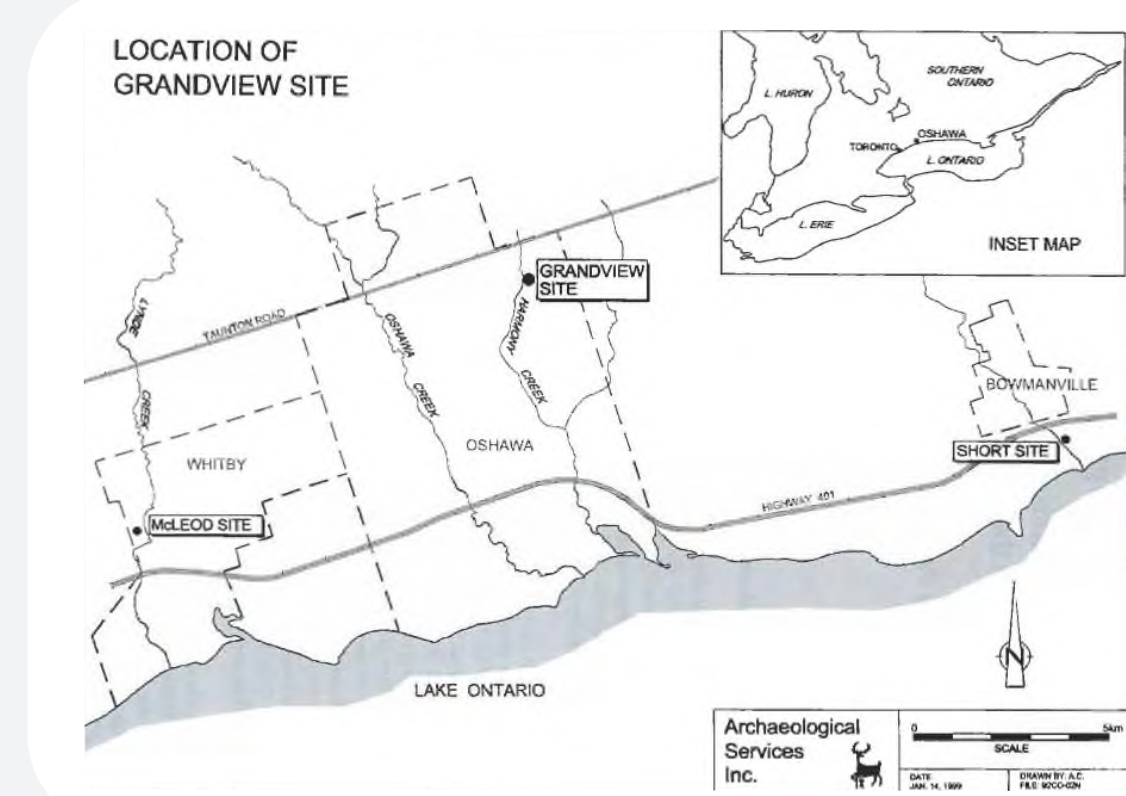


The MacLeod excavation, c. 1969, Rossland and Thornton Roads. Credit: Archaeological Services Inc.

Discovered in 1967, the MacLeod site is the second Wendat settlement in the area uncovered near the corner of Rossland and Thornton roads on the property of Howard MacLeod. This site is believed to be connected to the one at Grandview due to similar pottery found at both locations. It is likely that the community from the Grandview site moved on to this location after soils and firewood were exhausted.

This village was considerably smaller than the one at Grandview, with 5 longhouses, but with the addition of a high protective wall (palisade) that surrounded the village.

In the late 15th century, this community began moving west in response to increased conflict in the region. They likely merged with other villages to form first a large settlement at the Draper site in present-day Pickering, and later a three-hectare settlement near present-day Stouffville, known as the Jean-Baptiste Lainé site.



This map shows the locations of both archaeological sites found in Oshawa. Credit - Archaeological Services Inc.

Village and Clan Structure

Women held authority over many of the clan decisions, including food cultivation, arranging marriages to bind clans, and the selection of leaders. Families were related through female lines and resided in longhouses with 4 or 5 other families.

Women cultivated crops, particularly corn, beans, and squash while men were often out of the villages on hunting and fishing expeditions.

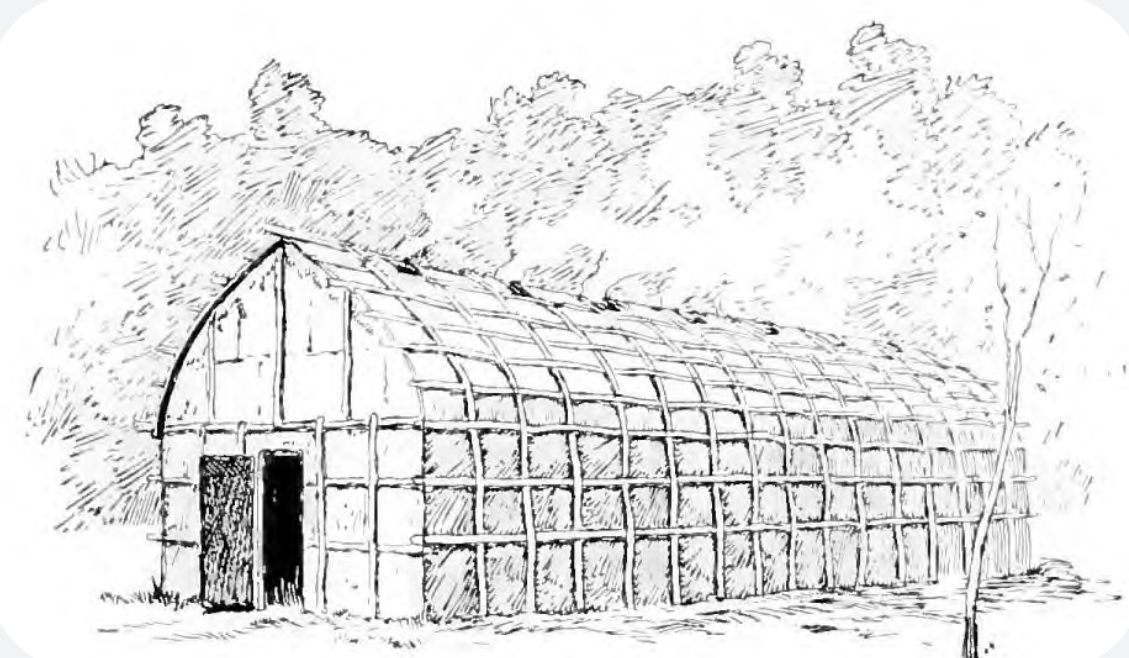
Pottery sherds forming portions of vessel rims, necks, shoulders and bodies were unearthed at both the Grandview and MacLeod sites, with both sharing a relatively rare technique of less porous glazing or slip.



One of many pottery sherds found at the Grandview site. Credit: Oshawa Museum

Longhouse Dwellings

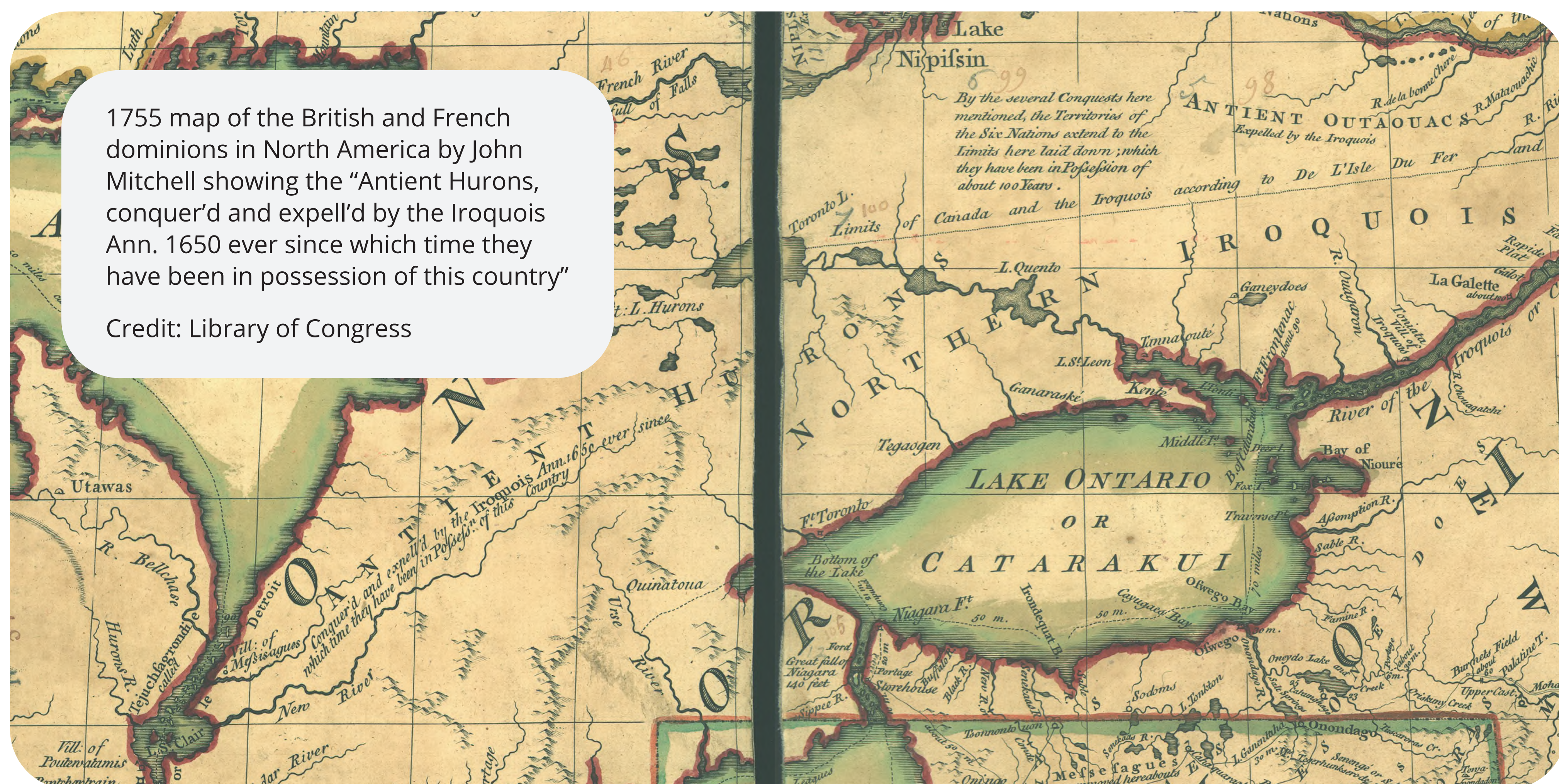
These long, narrow dwellings were made from maple or cedar saplings and covered by elm or cedar bark. The interior was arranged to allow space for several families with a row of hearths down the centre and openings in the roof allowed smoke to escape. Sleeping benches were located down either side of the structure.



A replica of one of the longhouses is on display at the Oshawa Museum in the Grandview Site Gallery.

Dispersal of the Wendat

In the late 15th century, the Wendat began moving northwest to the lands south of Georgian Bay. This was in response to increased conflict in the region and epidemics brought by the Europeans (smallpox, tuberculosis, typhoid). These made the Wendat vulnerable to attacks from the Haudenosaunee from south of Lake Ontario (referred to as Iroquois or Five Nations).



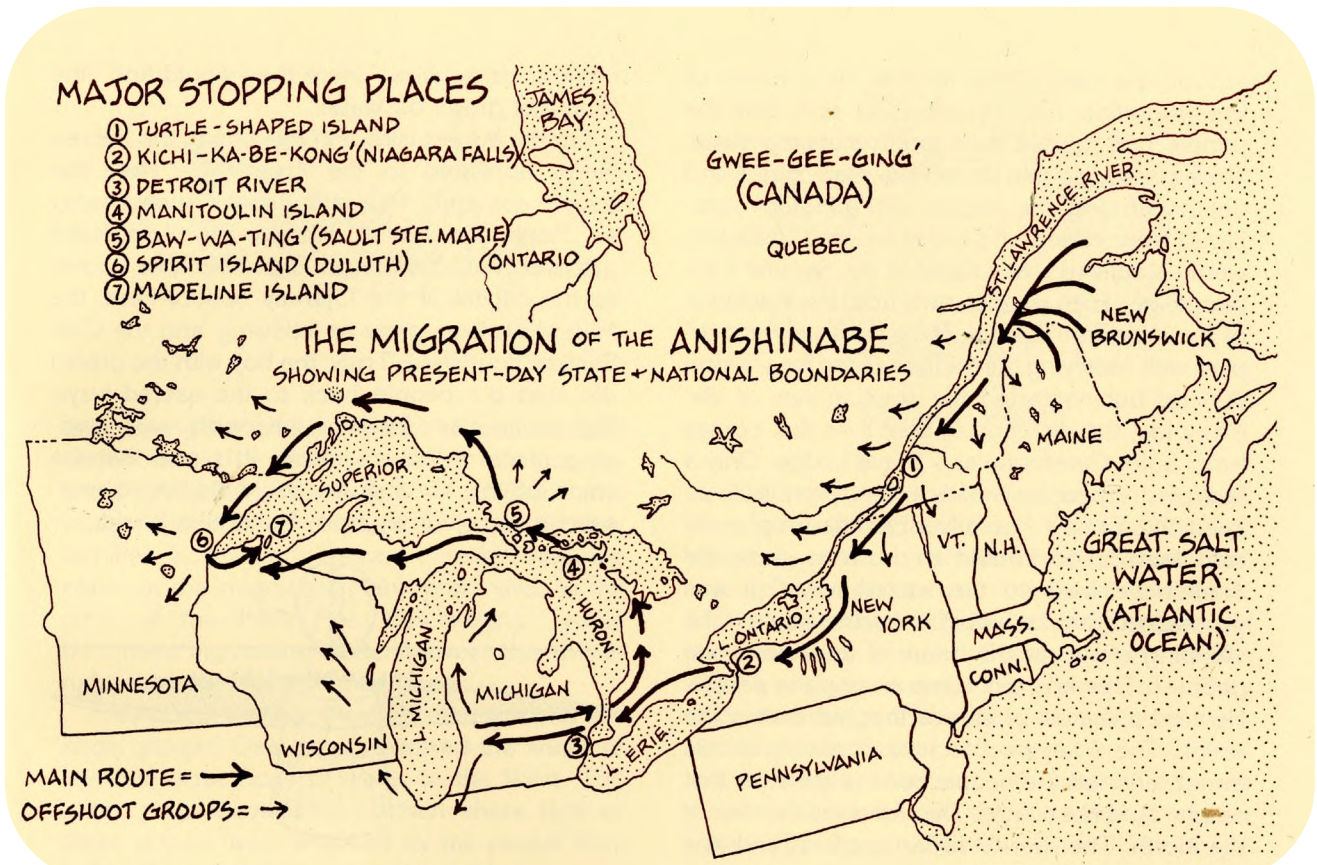
1700 - The Arrival of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg

The Michi Saagiig or Mississauga are part of the greater Ojibway Nation, which is under the Council of Three Fires (Niswi-mishkodewinan) along with other Anishinaabe speaking nations, the Pottawatomi and the Odawa.

According to oral tradition, the Three Fires nations migrated from the east coast over many centuries, long before the arrival of the Europeans. Eventually the Ojibway (and the Mississauga) came to settle on the northern shore of Lake Superior.

The Mississauga eventually moved southward from the Mississagi River area. Michi Saagiig means “People of the Great River Mouth”. By 1700, they (and the Ojibway) had expelled the Haudenosaunee from the north shore of Lake Ontario.

A nomadic people who moved with the seasons, they lived in small villages in conical birch bark wigwams housing 1 or 2 families. Their system of kinship is based on patrilineal clans or doodems. These clans formed a complex web of alliance networks and marriage and kin relationships that structured Anishinaabe law and governance in the Great Lakes region.



The Migration of the Anishinaabe Showing Present-Day State and National Boundaries. Reprinted from "The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway," by E. Benai, 2010, p. 102.



Mississauga of Scugog - ES Shrapnel Wigwams
Image credit: Indian Wigwams of Birch Bark by ES Shrapnel from Upper Canada Sketches by Thomas Conant (1898)

At this time, some of the Mississauga arrived in the basin of Lake Scugog, drawn by the bountiful resources. Manoomin (wild rice) grew in the shallow waters and was gathered using birch bark canoes. Furs and animals that were hunted during the winter were traded with the French in exchange for goods, which required travelling to trading posts. A major trade route would have included the Scugog Carrying Place trail which led to the Cabane de Plomb trading post near Oshawa harbour.

Map Legend

- Scugog Carrying Place Trail
- Oshawa Downtown Simcoe & King
- MacLeod Site
- Grandview Site
- Cabane de Plomb

The Scugog Carrying Place Trail

This ancient north–south “highway” or portage route carried goods and people from the lakeshore to Lake Scugog and beyond.

From Lake Ontario, one branch went northward by Harmony Creek and the other by the Oshawa Creek, which were much larger waterways at the time. The path of Simcoe Street has been said to roughly follow the western part of the trail.

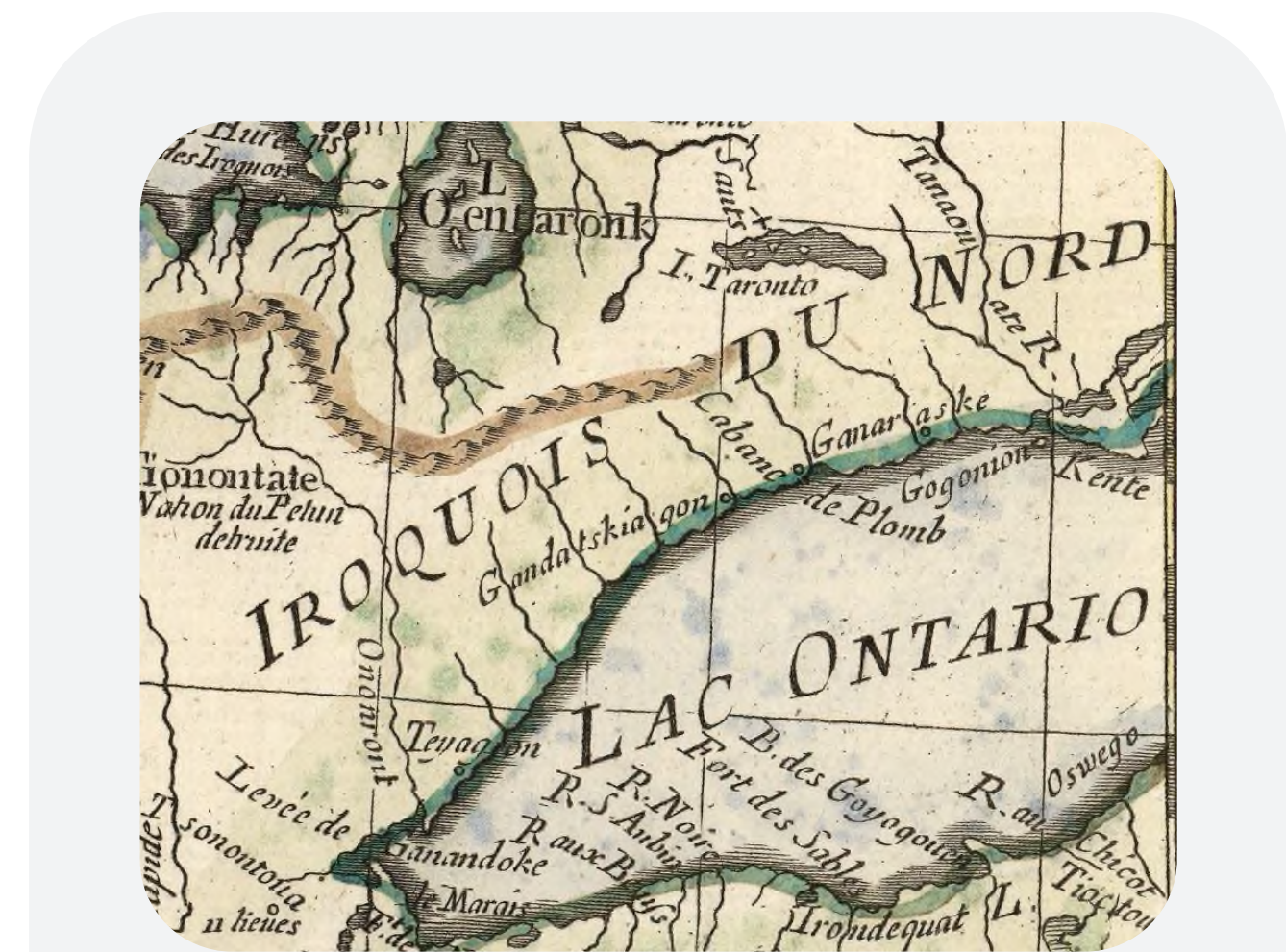
Canoes were used as far up the creeks as they could go before portaging. For this reason, Oshawa is believed to mean “that point at the crossing of the stream where the canoe was exchanged for the trail.”

The two footpaths converged near Columbus, then united and continued to Scugog Lake. The path of Simcoe Street has been said to roughly follow the western branch of the trail.

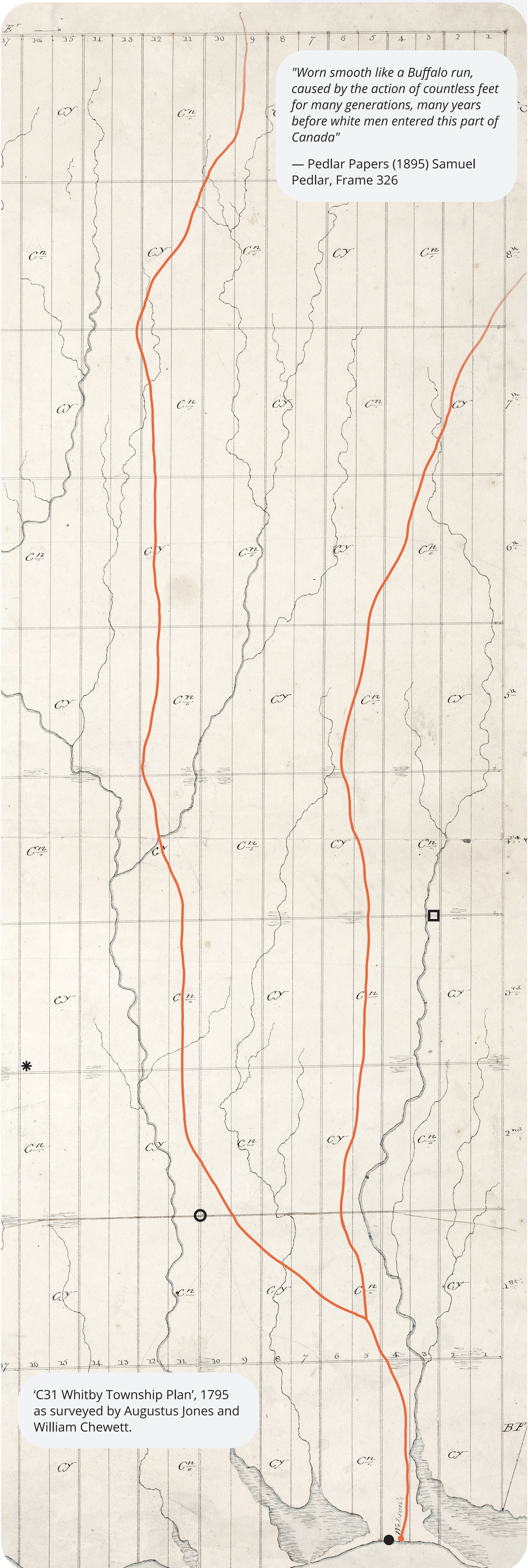
Cabane de Plomb - French Trading Post

In operation prior to 1759, the name meant Cabin of Lead, possibly because lead shot was an important commodity in the fur trade with the First Nations.

Trading posts such as this were built at strategic points on Lake Ontario at the mouths of rivers or at the ends of portage routes.



According to this D'Anville map from 1775, the Cabane de Plomb was located on the shoreline of Lake Ontario between the Oshawa and Harmony Creek near the southern terminus of the Scugog Carrying Place Trail.



"Worn smooth like a Buffalo run, caused by the action of countless feet for many generations, many years before white men entered this part of Canada"

— Pedlar Papers (1895) Samuel Pedlar, Frame 326

'C31 Whitby Township Plan', 1795 as surveyed by Augustus Jones and William Chewett.

1763 - A British Thirst for Land

Following the Seven Years War, British settlers began to take up Indigenous land which led to hostilities around the Great Lakes. In response, Crown representatives and 24 First Nations (about 2000 people) met at Niagara to discuss an alliance. This led to the British Royal Proclamation of

1763 which states that all land was Indigenous land until ceded by treaty. In 1764, First Nations met with the British at Fort Niagara to negotiate a renewed alliance, embodied in the Covenant Chain wampum, the Royal Proclamation and the Treaty of Niagara. The Mississauga were

represented by Wababicomicot, Weynakibio and Estawabey. The agreement was recorded in the Covenant Chain wampum, a Crown Treaty document and in the Treaty of Niagara alliance medal.



A reproduction of the 1764 Covenant Chain wampum belt. Source: Canadian Museum of History.

Wampum are sacred shell covered belts that are an integral part of Indigenous diplomacy. The information embedded in the belts and strings enabled Indigenous peoples to relay complex messages, intention and promise through the giving and acceptance of wampum.

"Anishinaabe people look to that wampum belt of 1764 that was given at the Treaty of Niagara as our Magna Carta of Indian Rights. (...) The British recognized that we owned the land, that we were autonomous and they accepted our sovereignty..."

Dr. Alan Ojiig Corbiere, Anishinaabe Knowledge Keeper

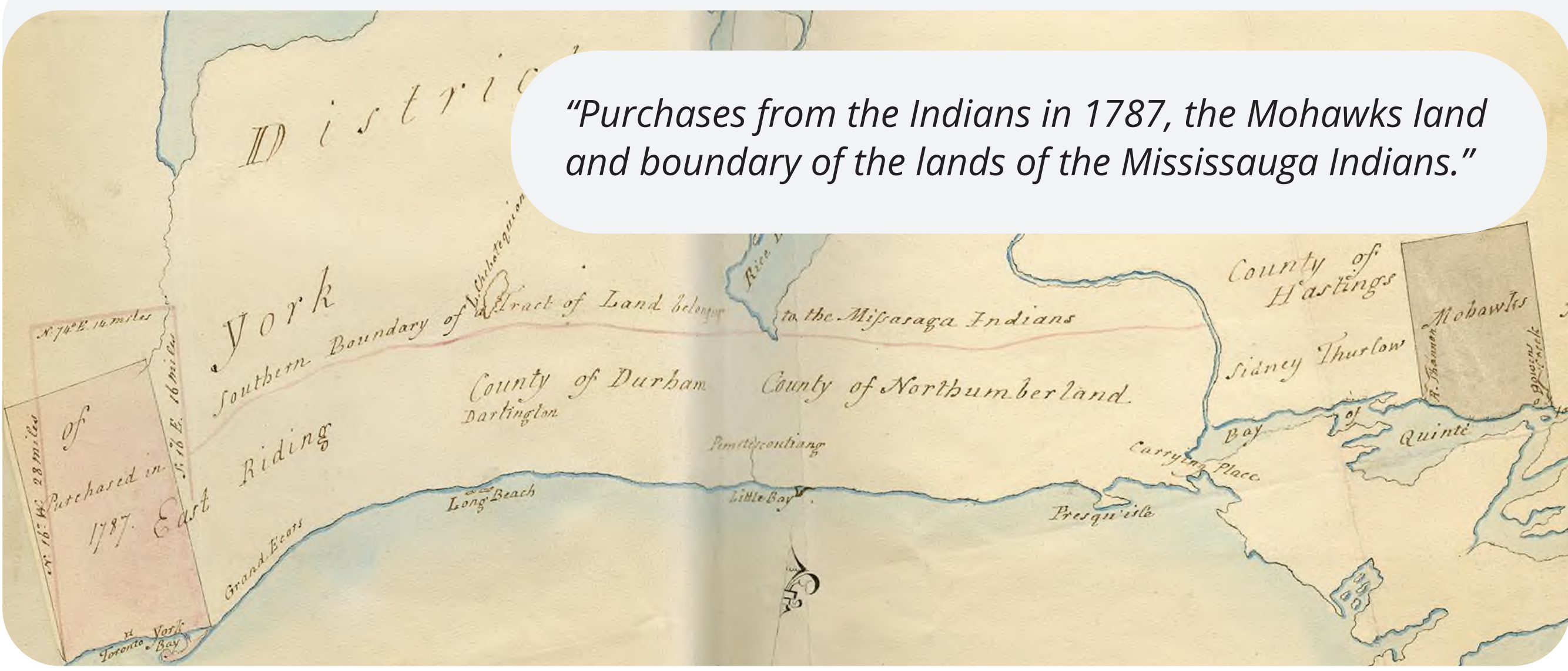
British officials were soon conducting land acquisition treaties and purchases with Mississauga and Ojibway people who were at a great disadvantage as they often did not understand English or the concept of land ownership. They believed they were sharing the land as they had done with other Indigenous nations for many years, under the concept of

"A Dish with One Spoon", in which land is shared to the mutual benefit of all inhabitants. This difference in understanding led to vastly different interpretations of these agreements and as a result, the Mississauga people lost their hunting and fishing economy and with it, the means to survive as they had always done.

The Gunshot Treaty

In September 1787, meetings were held at Carrying Place near the Bay of Quinte to work out an agreement to cede the lands along the north shore of Lake Ontario.

The resulting Gunshot Treaty (known as the Johnson-Butler Purchase) was so named as it covered the land as far back from the lake as a gunshot could be heard. However, while a deed was drawn up in 1787, details were unclear and inconsistent.



"Purchases from the Indians in 1787, the Mohawks land and boundary of the lands of the Mississauga Indians."

The area covered by the Gunshot Treaty is marked by a red line labelled, "Southern Boundary of a Tract of Land belonging to the Mississauga Indians" Map made by Sir David W. Smyth. Credit: Baldwin Collection of Canadiana

Officials of the time privately acknowledged the treaty was flawed but made little attempt to fix it. It remained in place for 136 years, setting the stage for centuries of conflict and misappropriation of land and land uses.

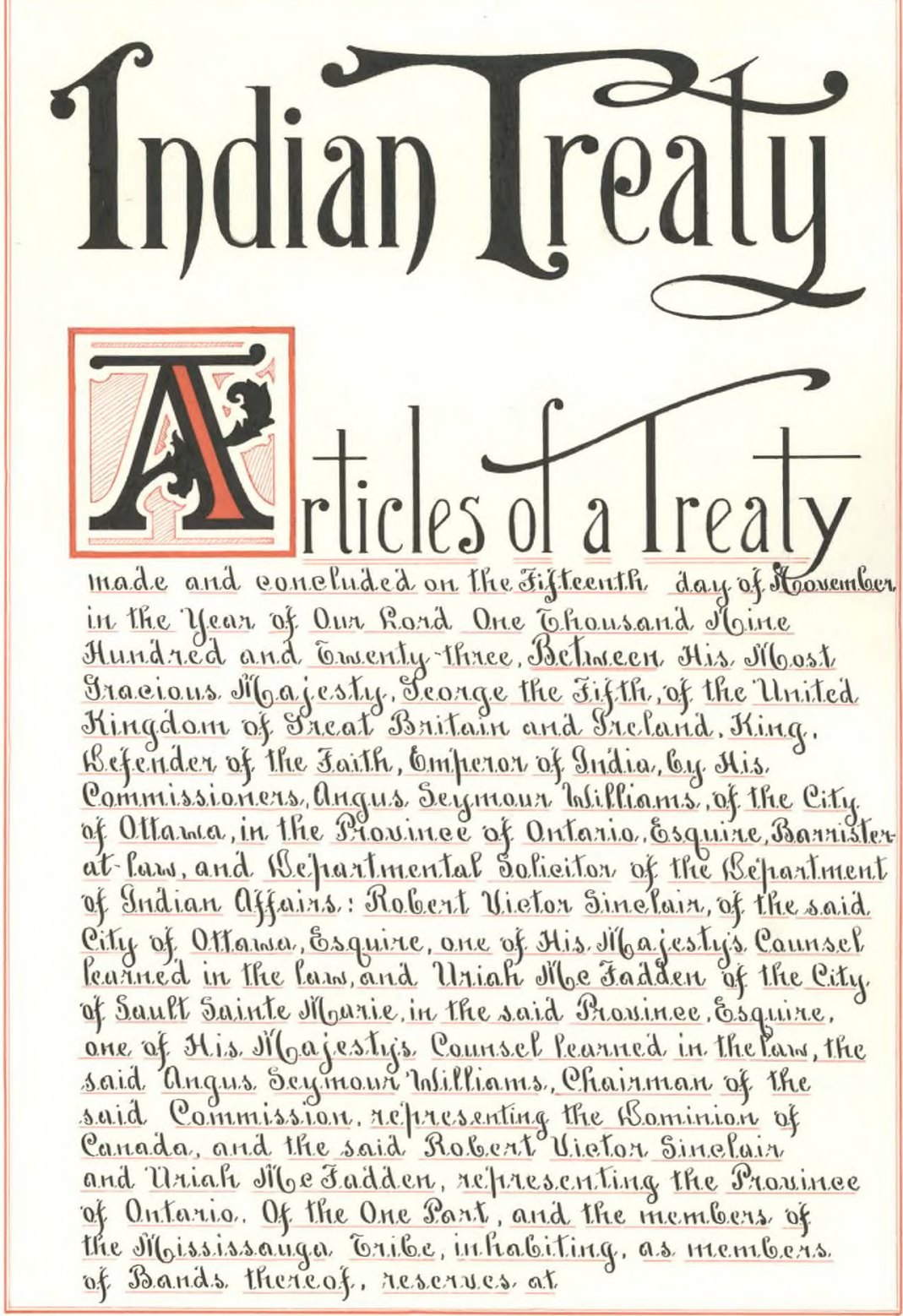
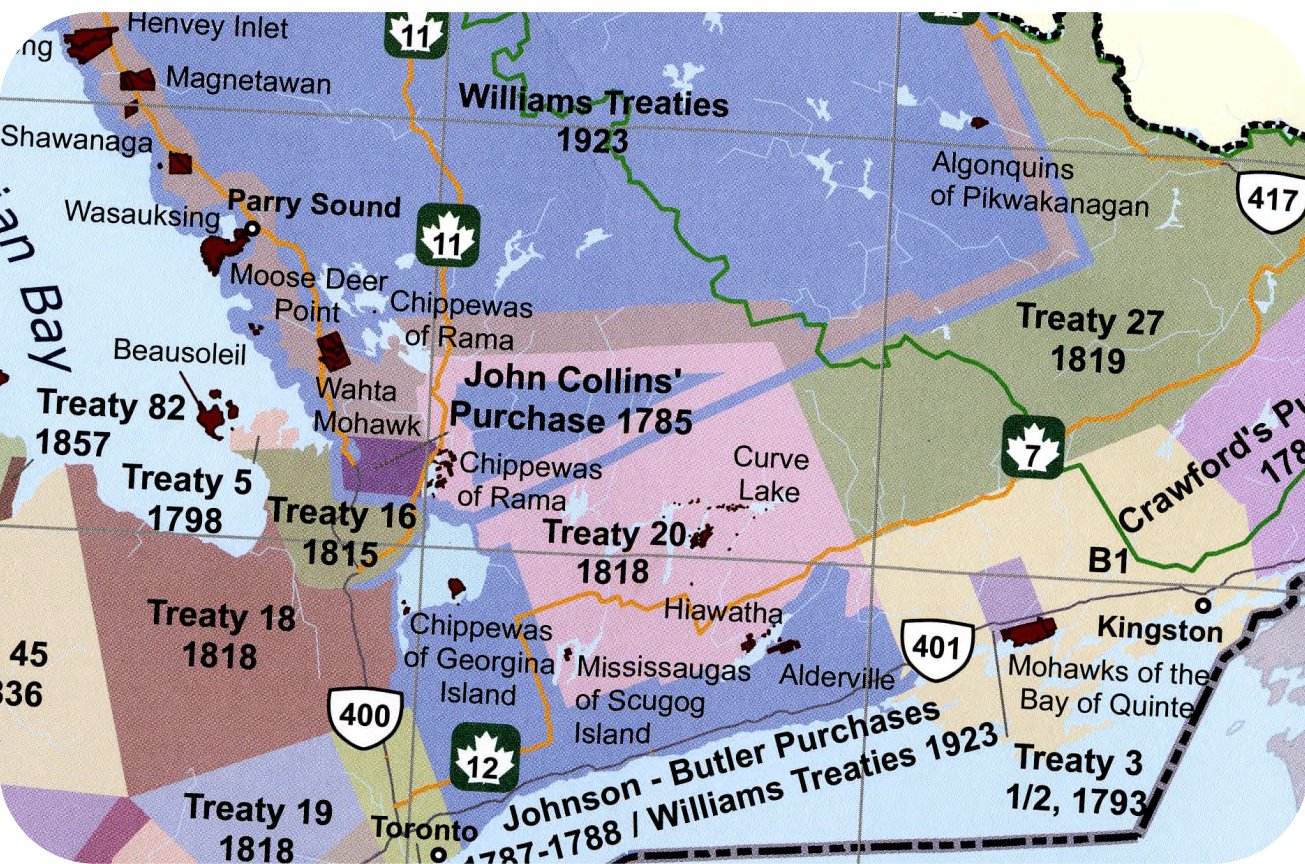
Williams Treaties

After many years of disputes regarding settlers encroaching upon the traditional Mississauga lands, investigations into the Gunshot Treaty and other land claims revealed that the Chippewa and Mississauga people had never relinquished their hunting and fishing rights to this land.

This led to the Williams Treaties of 1923, which covered the land between Georgian Bay and the Ottawa River, and the shore of Lake Ontario up to Lake Simcoe, land that had already been taken up by multitudes of settlers.

These new treaties were intended to resolve longstanding claims and disputes, but instead created continuing injustices — insufficient compensation, inadequate reserve lands, and the continued inability to freely exercise harvesting, hunting, and fishing rights.

- The Williams Treaties First Nations include:
- The Mississaugas of Scugog Island
 - The Mississaugas of Alderville
 - The Mississaugas of Curve Lake
 - The Mississaugas of Hiawatha
 - The Chippewas of Beausoleil
 - The Chippewas of Georgina Island
 - The Chippewas of Rama



A portion of the 1923 Williams Treaty entered into by the Dominion of Canada and the "Members of the Mississauga Tribe, inhabiting as members of Bands thereof, reserves at Rice Lake, Mud Lake, Scugog Lake and Alderville"

The Road to Reconciliation

In 2018, following years of legal action by the Williams Treaties First Nations, the Governments of Canada and Ontario formally apologized for the injustices endured by their people. The settlement included financial compensation, a recognition of

the Pre-Confederation Treaty harvesting rights so long denied by the Crown, and additions to reserve lands. Additionally, the Government provided a public apology for the wrongs that have been committed to the Williams Treaties First Nations.

We acknowledge that the City of Oshawa is situated on land within the jurisdiction of the Williams Treaties and on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, the Anishnaabe, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. This acknowledgement reminds us of our responsibilities to our relationships and the ancestral lands on which we learn, share and live.

