

When the White Man Came

The Story of the Attawandaron Peoples and the First Europeans in Dumfries

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Dumfries we know today was for generations upon generations the home of the Attawandaron peoples. A hunting ground and a camping ground for the tribe it provided ample prey and milder temperatures than other regions. It is not certain who the first European was that stepped upon this soil. However documents point to Etienne Brulé, a man who was sent from Europe to southern Ontario in 1626 in order to collect information about the area. From what he collected he recommended the area to missionaries on the European continent.

When he entered the area he found that it was where the Attawandaron peoples or the Attawandaron also known as the Neutral Nation resided. A peaceful nation, their name was given to them by the Huron and Iroquois meaning “they are those whose language is awry”. The actual name the Neutrals used for themselves was Chonnonton, “people of the deer”, or more accurately, “the people who tend or manage deer”.

They were extremely skilled in the making of arrow points and spearheads which have been discovered in the area. It was uncovered at their chipping stations that the flint material used was of a silica outcrop from the shores of Lake Huron, one of the few places where it is found. Flint was also discovered on the eastern side of Lake Erie.

When sites were excavated, they found that one Attawandaron Village had pottery that was made by natives from the east coast. With further investigation it was evident that they were a tribe of trade and commerce and their land was a common meeting place for tribes to trade in peace. At the Neutrals peak they had a total population of 40,000. The population dropped to 12,000 at the arrival of Europeans with detrimental diseases that were introduced to native communities as well as sessions of famine which had occurred in the early years of the 17th century.

They were mainly a hunting tribe and were powerful in that they controlled the quarries where flint was extracted to create arrowheads used for hunting and more politically, war. Because of this, they were used by both the Huron and Iroquois who were constantly at war with each other, and so they remained neutral (hence their name) as they were a source of weaponry for both tribes. Many encampments ran along the Grand River specifically in the Grand Valley region as it provided an ample supply of water.

Soon the relation between the Huron and Iroquois tribes and the Attawandaron was to come to an end as the Europeans arrived. The way of life and culture was disturbed by the interruption of the Europeans greedy for a gain in the fur trade industry. Soon there were new weapons from the white man and the Attawandaron were no longer seen as a powerful or useful neighbour for their flint as they were now provided with alternate means of weaponry. The derision aroused by the Europeans soon brought tribe against tribe. Providing them with weapons they introduced new methods of war that would prove detrimental for the Six Nations.

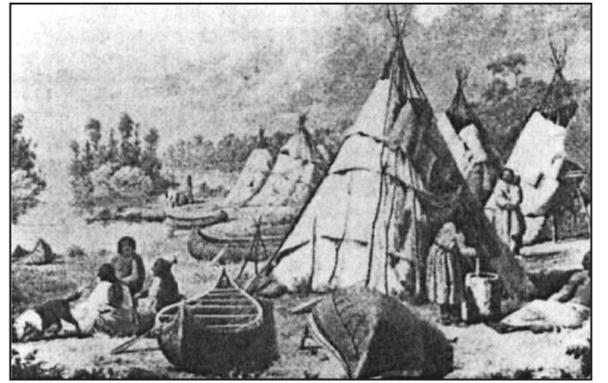
The Iroquois were supplied with weapons from the Dutch and English in exchange for the Iroquois beaver skins, while the Hurons were supplied with guns from the French. Soon what was known as the Beaver Wars commenced. By the year 1650 the Hurons had almost ceased to be and the French missionaries who ventured out to the new land in hopes of bringing Christianity were reportedly tortured and killed such as Fathers Brebeuf and Lalement. The victorious Iroquois then turned to the Neutral Nation.

Following the Huron defeat, the Iroquois declared war against the Attawandaron. The legend goes that the Attawandaron chief was to fight against the Iroquois chief. The last Attawandaron chief was named Tsouhariessen which means ‘child of the sun’. When the Attawandaron chief defeated the Iroquois chief, the Iroquois were greatly angered and fought the Attawandaron people and killed young and old, taking the able-bodied men that were captured to be used as fighters for the Senecas which were a fearful army that were not defeated until fifteen years later by the French.

By 1653, the Attawandaron people had radically reduced in number as they were constantly at war and under attack from the Iroquois. The last evidence of their existence was in French records of 1671. It is said that the remainder of the Hurons and Attawandaron fled together. Remnants of the battle were said to have been found such as pieces of bones and weapons.

Andrew Taylor brings to life the story from the other side; Mr. Andrew Jamieson of Ohsweken representing the Six Nations once said, “Present-day histories tell of the destruction of the Hurons, but they do not tell that it was Hiroshima-like relationship. The Saga of the Iroquois has yet to be written. They are the founders of English-speaking Canada, the largest group of U.E.L. who migrated in 1783, and the ones who saved the British in 1812. But for them there would be no Canada”.

In 1763, Upper Canada was in the hands of the British crown. Loyalists searching for land found numerous opportunities in the area. Joseph Brant, Mohawk leader and leader of the Six Nations was allotted six miles of land. On May 22, 1784 the region was bought from the Mississauga Indians. A few months later in October the Haldimand Proclamation granted the Grand River Valley to the Six Nations. It was written on two sides of a skin or parchment. Thumbprints were made using blood from the vein of the inner side of the left wrist by each Indian Sachems. Totems were also present representing the Chief Warriors. In 1798, Philip Stedman bought



Attawandaron Indian Encampment

94,305 acres of land which was confirmed by a crown grant. Eventually the land was bought by William Dickson which is now part of what we know as North Dumfries.

To this present day more and more artifacts are found. Canada has commemorated remains of a Neutral Village at Southwold Earthworks near St. Thomas and is a National Historic Site of Canada. There is also another site of a 500 year old Neutral village which is located nearby the Museum of Ontario Archaeology, in London. Long houses have been reconstructed and artifacts of the Neutral nation that were discovered are now displayed in the museum. There is also a reconstructed Neutral Village in London called the Lawson Prehistoric Indian Village. Here they offer children camps from ages 6-10 as well as pre-teen to teen camps from ages 11 to 15 as well as adult camp where you get to learn about archaeology, work in the museum public archaeology lab and perform archaeological digs and more! Discover more about the Six Nations in the area and find out more about the heritage of this land!

As a native once said, “We have lived upon this land from days beyond history’s records, far past any living memory, deep into the time of legend. The story of my people and the story of this place are one single story. No man can think of us without thinking of this place. We are always joined together.” It is important to remember how rich our heritage is and appreciate the intricate and interesting stories and history that is in our community.