

MISSISSAUGAS of the NEW CREDIT FIRST NATION

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TORONTO'S LANDOWNERS



a public education service of the

COMMUNITY HISTORY PROJECT
c/o 207-580 Christie St Toronto
M6G 3E3 c/o
tollkeeperscottage@gmail.com

ORIGINS

The Mississaugas of the New Credit have a very long history. They are Ojibwa, the largest nation of aboriginal peoples in North America at the time of Contact. The Ojibwa are Algonkian-speaking, along with other aboriginal peoples, including the Algonquin.

Their hunting and gathering territories ranged from near the present border with Quebec, across Ontario into the prairie provinces and down into what are now the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. This is where they were when Samuel de Champlain arrived in Ontario in 1610.

At that time, their neighbours to the south were the Hurons, Petuns (or Tobaccos), Neutrals and Eries whose territory ranged across southern Ontario and the north shores of Lakes Ontario and Erie.

The pre-Historic trade routes connected northern and western Canada with the Gulf of Mexico, so the copper mined in the Lake Superior region by the Ojibwa, plus the highly sought-after Ojibwa medicines and birchbark canoes, were all major trade items.

Some Ojibwa were concentrated around the Mississagi River which flowed into Lake Huron at its north shore. During the French Regime, these people were dubbed Mississaugas, to their enduring puzzlement, as they only thought of themselves as Ojibwa. But this name has a major role to play in later years in southern Ontario.

HISTORICAL CHANGE BEGINS

The French were first to explore and map the northern part of the continent, and followed the Mississippi to its mouth, founding the City of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana in the process. They developed an extensive trade in furs in the areas they explored and made allies of the aboriginal peoples with whom they traded.

South of the Great Lakes lived the Five Nations League (later the Six Nations Confederacy) who were Iroquoian-speaking peoples and are referred to collectively as the Iroquois. They were allies of the British in the Thirteen Colonies along the Atlantic seaboard and, incited by the British, attempted to disrupt the French fur trade in various ways. The Iroquois sent war parties to raid traders and settlers and their aboriginal allies, and attempted to colonize the north shore of Lake Ontario.

It was a period of increasing turbulence during which the nations of the Hurons, Petuns, Neutrals and Eries were destroyed, and any survivors fled elsewhere. As well, all aboriginal nations were being decimated by the white man's diseases, and by alcohol. The Iroquois were driven back to their homes south of the Great Lakes when the Ojibwa and their allies swept down from the north and drove them away. The Ojibwa who remained in southern Ontario from this time were mainly the people called Mississaugas, and they were joined by the few survivors of the destroyed nations on the brink of extinction.

THREE FIRES CONFEDERACY

The Ojibwa are called by many names with many spellings in historical records: Chippewa, Mississauga and Saulteaux, are examples. The variations depend upon what the literate map makers and explorers thought they heard them call themselves. Today, the term Anishinabe tends to be used.

The Ojibwa had allies among other Algonkian speaking peoples and with the Odawas (also called Ottawas) and Potawatomis, they formed the Three Fires Confederacy deep in pre-History. This Confederacy is still very active.

From 1759, the British took control of all French territories, and in the 1780s began to deal with an influx of people fleeing after the American Revolution who wished to remain loyal to the British Crown. These people were United Empire Loyalists, among whom were the Iroquois or the Five Nations League which became the Six Nations Confederacy after they arrived in Canada.

The difficulty for the British administrators of Canada was that they had not yet legally acquired ownership of the land from the aboriginal inhabitants. The land treaty process began, although the British were handing out grants to land which they did not yet own. In Upper Canada, the only residents were the aboriginal peoples and some French who had remained after 1759.

THE TORONTO PURCHASE

The aboriginal peoples of North America did not have any concept of land "ownership", as the land belonged to the Creator. They thought that the white men were asking permission to live with them, never realizing that they were actually surrendering all of their rights to hunt, fish, and move about the country in their seasonal lifestyle.

The first version of the Toronto Purchase in 1787 was a document referred to in its own time as the *Blank Deed* and a little later as the Gunshot Treaty (surrendering all of the land in which a gunshot could be heard). This "treaty" was developed at the Bay of Quints and was unsigned. It became a quiet embarrassment to the Upper Canadian administration, and a second round of negotiations in 1805 resulted in a tract of land 14 miles wide and 26 miles deep being ceded in a signed document. The Toronto Island, regarded as a sacred place by the Mississaugas and other nations, was never part of the deal.

The Toronto Purchase of 1805 was "signed" by the principal chiefs of the Mississaugas resident in the area. From this date, the Mississaugas were forced out of the Toronto area and settled on a 200 acre Farm Lot on the Credit River. Instead of paying them properly for the Toronto Purchase, the government used the money and built a log village of 20 houses (2 families per log house), a chapel and a Council House on the Farm Lot. This arrangement lasted, technically, for about three years, until the government wanted that land too, and the Mississauga Purchase was made. Although a few Mississauga families were still living in the Toronto region "illegally", the people of the village were forced out with nowhere to go.

LAND CLAIMS

In the meantime, Governor-General Lord Haldimand, wishing to ensure the loyalty of the Six Nations, granted them a huge tract of land along both sides of the Grand River where they developed the Reserve we know as Ohsweken. A smaller grant known as Tyendinaga, was also granted to the Six Nations. It is important to remember that all of this land had not yet been legally acquired from the Mississaugas.

When the Mississaugas who had been living at the Credit River were forced out of that location, the Six Nations invited them to live on two blocks of land at Ohsweken. In later years, the Mississaugas acquired enough money to buy the two blocks of land from the Six Nations - in effect buying back their own land for which they had never been properly compensated in the preceding years.

Changing from the Mississaugas of the Credit to the Mississaugas of the *New Credit* at their new location, they launched a land claim on the Farm Lot at the Credit River. This took 20 years in the so called "fast track" to be resolved, and the settlement allowed the Mississaugas to install the first part of a water and sewage system on the Reserve. A few years later, the Credit Mississaugas launched a land claim on the Toronto Purchase. It took the government of Canada three years to recognize this land claim as valid, and open formal negotiations. At present, the negotiations, now in their fifth year, are stalled as federal neglect of First Nations resumes.

You can study this matter further by consulting the Mississaugas' own website on the [Toronto Purchase](#).