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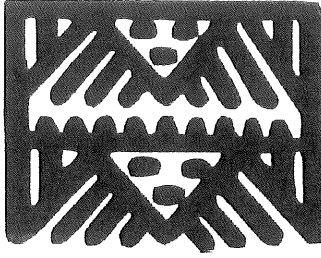


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A Wampum Hand of 12 Strings: An Extraordinarily Well Documented Piece, Now Missing

By Marshall Joseph Becker

Wampum, the commonly used name for tubular marine shell beads commonly used by Native peoples in the greater Northeast, may be best known from examples woven into bands of various sizes that are called “belts” (colliers in French). “Belts” of wampum were used as ornament, but they are best known from the historical documents when exchanged at treaties (Lainey 2004, Becker 2012). Also used in diplomacy, as well as for decoration, were strings of wampum. Individual or groups of such strings commonly were used in wampum exchanges, with wide variance in numbers and the count of beads, when specified. Bunches of wampum also are variously described in the records as hands, trees, or even clumps, with the numbers of strings incorporated commonly not specified. While bands of wampum received a great deal of attention, and still do, single strings and artifacts such as hands of wampum are commonly ignored. (NOTE 1).

Recently, through the kindness of Jenna McGuire (Culture Keeper; Historic Saugeen Métis: e-mail, 11 April 2019), an old publication was brought to my attention that provides extraordinary documentation for the history and use of a very large hand of wampum (Boyle 1905). Ms. McGuire reports that her “community is searching for an artifact that appears to have gone missing.” She confirms that this artifact had been donated to the “Ontario Provincial Museum/ Normal School” in 1904 when David Boyle was curator. The Provincial Museum became the Royal Ontario Museum in 1912, but Ms. McGuire’s search of the records from that period did not indicate a transfer of this piece when the collections were moved. A review of my own records produced the same result. (NOTE 2)

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The documentary record for this “hand” (Fig.) as reported by Boyle, who wrote most of the texts used in the annual reports, is reviewed here, beginning with the catalogue entry data for what I will call the Piché wampum.

27,008. – Twelve strings of cylindrical wampum, European make, presented by F. Lamorandiere, of Cape Croker, Ojibwa Reserve, per H. G. Tucker, Barrister, Owen Sound, Ont. Two of the strings consist wholly of white beads, the others of purple and white, arranged four and five of the former [and] from two to three of the latter. Mrs. Lamorandiere [] formerly Mrs. Benoit, received these from her mother, Mrs. Gonnevillie, to whom they were given by Mrs. Piché, an Ojibwa woman of Saugeen or Sauging. These beads were regarded by the family as entitling the holder to a portion of land, in what is now the County of Bruce. The strings are twelve inches long, but were probably much longer at one time. See description elsewhere. Boyle 1905: 15

Boyle (1905: 48) identifies Mr. F. Lamorandiere as an “Indian interpreter at Cape Croker.” Cape Croker is approximately 125 miles northwest of Toronto. The ascription of these beads to “European” or colonial makers probably reflects Boyle’s believe that most such drilled shell artifacts were a result of “factory” labor. This and other misperceptions also appear in the longer report on this artifact, some probably deriving from “a statement made to me by the late Ska-ná-wa-ti, who was for so many years the Six Nation Firekeeper...” (Boyle 1905: 48). The Lamorandiere text, as recorded by Boyle (1905: 48), is as follows:

[A]bout 1816 when the voyageurs and adventurers from Lower Canada began to be attracted to the upper country (les Pays d’ en haut) to engage in the fur trade with the Indians, one M. Piché took himself to Sauging (Saugeen). About 1818 Piché married a woman of the Chippewas (Ojibwas) of Sauging. They had no family, and when he died his widow was taken care of by Mrs. Augustine Gonnevillie, (more frequently called Grandevillie), who was the daughter of Joseph Lange and a Cree woman. She married Gonnevillie, or Grandevillie in the Red River country, and the two removed to Goderich, and Sauging. Mrs. Grandevillie cared for her till she (Mrs. Piché) died. Mrs. Piché in gratitude for all the care bestowed on her, presented Mrs. Grandevillie with these strings of wampum, saying that they would entitle Mrs. Grandevillie to her (Mrs. Piché’s) portion of land in the Sauging country. Augustine Gonnevillie died after raising a very large family, and his youngest daughter got married to Francis Benoit, who died near Sarnia. Mrs. Benoit took charge of her mother until she (Mrs. Grandevillie) died, having bequeathed to Mrs. Benoit the strings of beads, repeating the words of Mrs. Piché, that the wampum would entitle her to one share of land in Sauging territory.

Mrs. Benoit became Mrs. F. Rocher de Lamorandiere.

The land claim was never acted on, as there was no need of doing so, because land was then cheap.

It may be well to remark, however, that the gift of these beads from one tribe to another, or an individual to another, was regarded as very solemn and binding, and a compact made that way was never broken.

Having no use for the beads except in remembrance of my late wife, and as a momento of the old times, I freely donate them to the Department of Education to be placed in the Provincial Museum, or any other place, as the Curator may think fit F. Lamorandiere”

The 12 strings, as depicted in Figure 73 of Boyle’s publication, included about 590 beads. The numbers of beads in each string varies from about 45 to 55. If the strings originally included perhaps 600 to 700 beads, the total would have been smaller than the number usually used to weave a small wampum band, which would generally include from 800 to 1,000 beads (Becker 2008). Left to right, strings one and four appear to be those noted as entirely of white wampum. The remainder of the strings are composed of a mixture of white and dark (purple or black) beads, but no specific pattern is evident. The strings are bound by a ribbon at the “top” end. The upper ends of strings 10 through 12 seem exposed, as if some beads had been lost. Probably this reflects loss of wampum from the bottom of the strings, allowing the column of beads to slip down the string. Many of the bottom ends of the strings appear frayed, as if any original knots tying off the string may have been damaged allowing a varying number of beads lost from the damaged strings. *Continued on page 6.*



Continued from page 5 As Ms. McGuire points out, David Boyle “was actively engaged in artifact exchanges with other institutions.” This remained common practice throughout the Americas well into the second half of that century. Boyle, however, was usually a very careful scholar. Yet Ms. McGuire’s search of his correspondence has not revealed a possible exchange of this piece. Given the complexity and fragility of this artifact, some of the strings may have become separated, rendering this piece even more difficult to identify. While we may expect to find this piece among Canadian collections, the possibility exists that it is now held anywhere within the wide world.

NOTE 1 Another group, or “collection,” of wampum with a history that is moderately well documented originally contained five examples: four belts and a hand (Becker 2016). One of these four belts and the hand cannot now be located. NOTE 2 The information on the Royal Ontario Museum wampum holdings provided to me by Ms. Mary Tivy (Tivy 1977) begins with a listing of four strings with the caption “Old Normal School Collection given to R. O. M.” These four, all donated in the 1890s, are numbered 12949, 17758, 2011 and 2012. At least one wampum band in the ROM collections also came from the Normal School holdings (Becker 1977).

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