

# Foreword

by Gidigaa Migizi (Doug Williams)

I have been told the stories about the “ancient ones” as we call them, by the older people who helped raise me. When you translate it from our language, it means “people that lived long ago.” These stories have not been told as part of the archaeological narrative in what is now known as Ontario. The Elders who were part of my upbringing were telling me stories that were told by their forefathers, that were told by their grandparents, and so forth. Our stories are passed down from generation to generation—that’s how we keep our history. It is important to understand this history if you want to understand the antiquity of humans in Ontario. These are stories that have been excluded in the telling of the peoples of the past in Ontario mainstream archaeology, until now. It is about time that the Anishinaabeg are part of this narrative and are being incorporated into the story of Ontario. This is good and wonderful progress, and as a Storyteller and Knowledge Keeper for my people, it tells me that archaeologists are finally listening.

I believe that archaeologists, working within their scientific frameworks, are able to find out certain things. However, they are not able to know the whole story with science alone. For example, archaeologists can’t be entirely sure about who the ancient ones were in terms of their ethnicity/culture. Who were they, really? Most archaeologists believe that village dwellers were Iroquoian, but were they? Were they actually half Anishinaabeg? Or were they all Anishinaabeg? Or were they part Huron-Wendat?

These ancient ones intermarried. I know that our old people say that we lived with each other, we lived beside each other, and that we especially lived with the Huron-Wendat in the winter time so that we could access the food that they stored. In other words, we would have access to their corn and squash because they saved it, and we didn’t. Although the Anishinaabeg did get into the corn culture, we had the corn culture too. And we saved seed after we were introduced to corn. Our stories tell about the saving of seeds. For example, Anishinaabeg had what they called “Georgian Bay seeds” and these were interesting to them because there was a lot of reference to them

in our oral histories as being a nice type of corn to have because it stored well in Ontario. The corn that is largely found on archaeological sites in southern Ontario was mostly traded corn with the Iroquoians and Huron-Wendat, which were strains that came generally from the south.

There's all kinds of activities that the old people talk about that occurred over a long period of time. As I've told in some previous stories, the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg have been around a long time, and the Wendat were in Ontario somewhere around A.D. 800. This is not a fixed date. We didn't tell these things by specific dates, we told them by story which included nuances and gestures that can only be understood orally. And that's how we kept knowledge of the ancient peoples. These corn-growing peoples came here a long time ago and I can estimate by the gestures that were displayed during the telling of these stories that they were referring to a specific time frame. An example of what I mean is that a flick of the mouth by the storyteller, when they talk about the distant past, would be 500 years or so. Thus, a flick, a flick, and a flick of the chin and the mouth when speaking about a distant horizon says that was approximately 1500 years ago, give or take a few hundred years. So this indicates to me that somewhere around A.D. 600–800, corn started to really come into Ontario.

These were the stories told by my Elders, that were told by their Elders, and so on—there is no cause for me to doubt them. There is no reason for them to mislead or tell a false history. So it is really interesting if that story correlates to the dates found in the scientific evidence produced by the archaeologists. It really is interesting to me that finally somebody is doing this kind of work. I admire Dr. Finlayson for publishing this volume and for being able to think like this: that he has listened to my work, that he has talked to me, and that he is able to pick up on something that is probably quite foreign to him. That he has not dismissed the Anishinaabeg in his work and that our history is taken into account. This is all I can ask for, so that in the end we may come to a different conclusion about the history of Ontario.

Our stories may vary slightly, but there should not be huge discrepancies in coming to understand the truths of the past. Our stories should be able to match the science and vice versa. It's an exciting approach, to me. You've got to take in the oral story, you've got to take in the nuances of the culture, and you also have to listen to the language. The language is also used by our people to carry on history, to know history, and to speak about history—it's built right in the language and into our stories.

For example, we teach about the glaciation in Ontario by the telling of stories about Nanabush, or as we know him, Nanabozho. It is a story about Nanabozho and Biboon, who is the Spirit of Winter, and they had a fight about who was the strongest. And for a while, Biboon would win and ice would form in Ontario. Nanabozho then elicited the help of Niibin, the Spirit of Summer—a Manitou of summer, which is what we call spirit: Manitou. Everybody should know that. Every Canadian should know that that these are the words we use and that they are not idle meanings, these are living meanings, these are storytelling meanings. These are profound ancient sources of information. And so when the fight was on, and Biboon was winning, glaciation was happening in Ontario. So that is an example of the way the Elders taught us about when glaciation happened. Thus, when the earth heated up again they said, “Well, Niibin was winning.” And again, as I mentioned above, this happened with their lips moving and telling the story with gestures that indicated this happened many thousands of years ago.

This story, to me, matches the science which basically says that at a certain time glaciation happened in Ontario and then glaciation moved out and humans returned. Our story, and the story of science, says humans came into Ontario from somewhere else. Our stories, though, go further and say that we were actually created at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River which we call the “Big River” in our language. So when you consider all, both sides, the story telling and the orality of the culture of the Anishinaabe and the archaeological science, they really do tend to match. Dr. Finlayson’s text is an indication that we are arriving at a more inclusive and a more fulsome understanding of the ancient peoples of Ontario, and I am hopeful this will result in a more robust and comprehensive interpretation of the past.

Something I feel is significant for archaeologists to know, is that my people traded heavily with the Haudenosaunee and with the Wendat. The Iroquois peoples were better at making certain things, and our people knew it. Similarly, the Iroquois peoples knew we were better at making other things. For example, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat loved our canoes, but they couldn’t make a birch bark canoe even if they tried, as was the joke. But it was the same with our people—we recognized that they were really good pottery makers. So, we would trade numerous birch bark items for large amounts of pottery because we were good at working with birch bark and they were good at working with pottery. This means we would have Iroquois pottery with us, and they would have Anishinaabe birch bark items with them.

Now birch bark really deteriorates quite quickly in terms of the archaeological record, within 200 years or so, while pottery can lay on the ground for thousands of years. So when an archaeologist comes across a pottery find, the assumption is that it is Iroquoian. There is no archaeological evidence of Anishinaabeg in this instance because most of our items are perishable. This kind of thing can easily happen and as a result, the archaeological record is misinterpreted.

My other concern about archaeology, and science in general, is that the archaeologists and the scientists don't know our language, and so how can they know those stories? And how do archaeologists determine which peoples were on the land based on finding pottery? Pottery doesn't talk, right? Therefore, if archaeologists conclude that the pottery means an Iroquoian presence, they, in fact, can be misinterpreting the entire story. Why are "isolated find spots" of pottery generally labelled as Iroquoian? So if archaeologists conclude that is an Iroquoian site when, in fact, it is being used by Anishinaabeg and the pottery was a trade item, then in this instance, the past is being grossly misinterpreted.

I will also point out that there are Anishinaabeg who would make pottery. Don't get me wrong, they would make pottery and they had their own style, but a lot of it was emulated. As I mentioned before, it had been conceded by the Anishinaabeg that the Iroquois made better pottery and thus, our people would also copy their styles, for lack of a better term. The Iroquois also tried to copy our styles. You see, their canoes were made out of mostly elm bark, and their houses were made out of elm bark, while ours were made out of birch bark. The birch bark was by far superior in terms of a covering for houses and for canoes. Elm bark deteriorated much faster, it was hard to work with, and it was leaky. The elm tended not to take to pitch and bear fat that well in terms of sealing, and they only tended to last one season. So Haudenosaunee canoes tended to be a bit bigger and clumsier and it took more men to carry them. They were not easily portageable. And because of that, they desired and traded their pottery for our birch bark canoes. So when archaeologists dig up pottery and look at rocks, there's no evidence of that kind of social interaction, or of that kind of reality. It is important for archaeologists to seek and understand these stories. It is information that archaeologists must learn about our culture and our people, to better understand what was happening in the past.

Michi Saagiig territory was known as a land between peoples, as well as a land between geologic ecosystems. Our homelands, situated between two powerful nations, defined our very identity. The Michi Saagiig were known as the diplomats, the

messengers, and the peace-keepers. The Anishinaabeg to the north, were led primarily by the Odawa who tended to be looked at by the other Anishinaabeg communities as being really good at war and warfare and were also extremely proud and extremely well dressed. They were seen as the enforcers and as the leaders. And then to the south lived the Haudenosaunee who were very warlike for a time and disrupted relationships through internal conflict and their periodic raiding of neighbouring nations. Our stories of the ancient ones tell of bringing peace to the Haudenosaunee. Our people messaged peace to them. It was part of our identity to do so.

The stories of peace were born from the Mississauga Anishinaabeg and taken to others by our holy people. I spoke often with the old people who raised me about a man known in our stories as Chi-Nibiish who was raised in the Lake Simcoe area long ago. There were a lot of Anishinaabeg living there as well as a lot of Wendat. And there was a really big village at the south end of the lake where they were all living together. Our stories tell us that Chi-Nibiish was raised by the Huron-Wendat, but he was really a Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg kid. For reasons we have yet to understand fully, this arrangement was agreed upon by both parties. Thus, Chi-Nibiish spent a lot of time with the Huron-Wendat, sanctioned by his parents because he was a dreamer and he was dreaming about peace. His parents nurtured his dreams and he told them that he dreamed of peace with the Haudenosaunee, that he wanted to save them. So he went to live with the Huron-Wendat so that they could teach him the Haudenosaunee language in order that he could travel to Haudenosaunee lands and speak to them about peace.

We know that at times our people adopted others from different nations. Our stories speak about the adoption of children, so that our different cultures of peoples could understand one another, could build kin relationships and allyship through the bond of families. So close, at times, were our relationships with other nations of people, that even our stories sometimes tend to mirror one another's. Also remember, that the Michi Saagiig were diplomats, and in order to be diplomats they had to speak the Haudenosaunee language. They had to speak the Huron-Wendat language, the Michi Saagiig dialect, and the Odawa dialect. They had to be proficient at four languages. And to learn these languages, they went to "school" for lack of a better term, and spent considerable time in each of these nations' communities. So there were relationships, alliances, political agreements, and all sorts of interaction between our peoples and many other nations over thousands of years in Ontario. Is this being captured by the current archaeology? By finding pottery?

In this text, Dr. Finlayson has managed to tell a more inclusive story of the past and so it is refreshing in that it offers glimpses of a largely omitted part of the history of Ontario: the Anishinaabeg history.

I will conclude with a story about what are now known as the Seaton Heritage Lands and the Pickering Airport Lands as it is pertinent to this work in particular. These lands are located very close to the Rouge River Valley portage. If you could picture it: portaging from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe. The Toronto portage was heavily used by people from the west end of the lake, who lived around the Toronto islands. Anybody from the east side coming this way, who had to go up to Lake Simcoe, used the Rouge River portage. And then eventually they finally joined up there. The Rouge River portage joined up there with the Toronto portage and then they went together on to Lake Simcoe. So we were the Michi Saagiig on the east side who heavily used the Rouge Valley portage. Although my people did trade a lot around Toronto, the significance of the area around the Rouge River in particular, was that it was known as *our route*. At the mouth of the Rouge River there was a Nishnaabeg village known to us as Shingwauk-ong, meaning “the place of the pines.” That is how it was known. And when they were living there, especially in the summer, there was the salmon run, and they hunted all over the area, including all the tributaries that flow into the Rouge River. My people are the Michi Saagiig: the people of the big lake. We were also known as the people of the big river mouths, as we could be found at the mouths of the many rivers that flowed into Lake Ontario.

It is these types of histories, this type of cultural knowledge, that serves to enrich the telling of the story of the past. It is critical for archaeologists to understand that there is a bigger picture that they must strive to include in the archaeological narrative. My people are virtually erased in Ontario archaeology, and given very little mention. However, we were, and still are, living all over these territories you now call southern Ontario. We hold stories of deep antiquity of these lands within our communities and our nations collectively. We had a major impact upon the ancient political landscape in Ontario, including influencing settlement patterns, resource use and allocation, and burial and ceremonial spaces. Archaeologists do not disagree with the fact that Anishinaabeg peoples have been in Ontario for thousands of years, they just need to get better at telling that part of the story—and this book is a good start.

Miigwech for listening.

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