

NOT NUMEROUS IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD

First Contact at Perth

In the course of European colonization of Canada, the generosity of spirit and practical assistance of First Nations to the newcomers was considerable and in some cases crucial to White survival. Nevertheless, while examples of such aid to settlers at the Perth Military Settlement occurred, immigrant and indigene along the Tay and Mississippi were more often wary of each other and preferred to keep their distance.

Perhaps the greatest indigenous contribution to European settlement was the birch bark canoe, making possible both short and distant travel, and transport of goods, when waterways were the only 'roads' in the backwoods. In winter, travel was often only possible at all thanks to the native snowshoe and toboggan.

Settlers learned from First Nations to tap the maple tree to produce syrup and sugar from its sap, not only 'sweetening' their lives, but doing so at the investment of only their own labor when access to cane sugar from the West Indies was limited and expensive. The settlers' sweet tooth was further satisfied when indigenous hunter-gathers taught them to follow the honey bee¹ to its hive and to harvest both the honey and wax for candles.



First Nations Maple Sugar Making

In the earliest days of White settlement, clothing, or the cloth to make it, was also in short supply and prohibitively expensive. Learning from the First Nations how to tan and sew deer hide, or trading for items produced by aboriginal women, provided warm durable clothing; vests, jackets, pants, coats and moccasins.

Settlers learned aboriginal methods of preserving venison and other meat by cutting it in strips and smoking it. Drawing upon centuries of traditional knowledge First Nations' medicines often soothed settler illnesses. Likewise, their shared botanical knowledge helped settlers produce tastier and more nutritious meals with wild herbs, berries, fruits and other edible plants.

¹ Although there is some fossil evidence that a species of honey bee existed in North America millions of years ago, it had been long extinct. The honey bee exploited by the Native peoples was not native to the continent, but introduced by European colonists in 1622.

This list, and other contributions, tends however to conflate events over a huge geographic area and nearly three centuries of history, from Jacques Cartier's first encounter with native North Americans in 1534 through establishment of the Perth Military Settlement in 1816. It also better reflects the more interdependent and harmonious Indigenous-European relations prevailing under the French Regime than it does First Nations' interaction with British settlers following the conquest of 1760. Finally, the extent of these interchanges was much greater in the earlier settlements of old Quebec, or even the Loyalist settlements of Upper Canada, where native populations were considerably larger than in the immediate environs of the later Perth Military Settlement.

It is estimated that at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans, the native population in Ontario was about 60,000 people. It is (unreliably) estimated that the eastern Algonquin population (Ontario and Quebec) was in the order of 15,000 ... The arrival of the Europeans in the early 1500s brought about huge changes in the native way of life. Many native populations were decimated by European diseases ... the common cold, measles, influenza and smallpox became deadly epidemics in native communities.²

Inter-tribal wars, a result of the European introduced fur trade and First Nations being drawn into broader conflicts between the colonial powers, also negatively impacted population numbers. This was particularly so for the Algonquin who sustained significant losses in the Iroquois offensive of the mid-17th century that pushed them into the northern reaches of the Ottawa Valley or the headwaters of its tributary streams. Algonquin re-occupation of the Ottawa Valley did not begin until the 1670s. There are no reliable statistics, but estimates prepared by Statistics Canada, covering a combine of tribes spread over the eastern and northern parts of what is now Ontario and western Quebec, suggest that, by the turn of the 19th century, the Algonquin Nation had been reduced to about 5,000 people living on both sides of the Ottawa River.

Statistics Canada			
Table made up from Memoirs on the Aboriginal population of certain territories in North America now situated partly in the United States of America and partly in Canada.			
Tribe	Place Inhabited	1736	1763
Algonquin, Ottawas, Potawatamis, Sauteaux, Crees, and other related tribes,	Valley of the Ottawa, Valley & Islands of Lake Huron, North of Lake Superior, Valley of the Kaministikwia River & from thence to the Rainy Lake, Red River & Swan River Districts.	11,475	20,650

The racial, social and economic mindset of most settlers at Perth often made indigenous people somehow 'invisible', yet it remains apparent that, within the original limits of the Settlement, the number of aboriginals present in 1816 was, in fact, very small.

² *Human History of the Rideau*, Ken W. Watson.

*Recent estimates ... suggest that the number of indigenous people residing in the region would have been in the hundreds – in marked contrast to the thousands of emigrants*³

The greater part of the 19th century Algonquin Nation, whose land was appropriated for the Perth Settlement, more commonly frequented the larger river valleys of the Rideau, Mississippi, Madawaska, and Ottawa, or lived further north along the Little River and Lake Nippissing. Only a few family groups seem to have seasonally visited smaller tributary streams like the Tay.

That there were so few natives visible in what became the southern townships of Lanark County was interpreted by settlers sent to Perth to mean that the land was unoccupied and unexploited. Their European roots left them unable to grasp that, as a semi-nomadic people, the Algonquin moved constantly from one place to the next in search of food, and required a vastly greater territory to maintain their socio-economic lifestyle than did a Scots, English or Irish settler living on a farm. Larger Algonquin bands gathered each summer along the major rivers to fish, hunt and garden, but when winter arrived, they spread out into smaller hunting and trapping camps made up of family groups.

A few months after his arrival at the Perth Settlement in the summer of 1817, Reverend William Bell, the touchstone of Perth's earliest recorded history, wrote in his diary that,

Two families of Indians in three canoes, came down the river and pitched their tent upon the island in the middle of the village. They were the first I had seen since I came to the place. They had deer, muskrats, and various kind of fowls which they exposed for sale. The deer was small, but they sold it at a dollar a quarter, the head with the horns at the same price.

*The native Indians are not numerous in this neighbourhood. Since we came here, I have seen only two hunting parties in the town, and now and then a man and his squaw selling baskets made of birch bark. They all carry the tomahawk, and seem to be very quiet and inoffensive. On the banks of the Mississippi [River] they seem to be more numerous. In a camp there, I lately saw not less than twenty, young and old altogether.*⁴

Bell is not always the most reliable of sources, but his observation that there were few representatives of Canada's First Nations in the immediate environs of the nascent settlement is probably accurate. Those small groups he did encounter, however, were of the Algonquin Nation whose,

... hunting grounds, reserved to their tribe [by the Royal Proclamation of 1763] ... which they occupied and enjoyed long before the conquest of Canada, begins at Point d'Original, above the Long Sault on the Ottawa River, and following up that river to Mattawa, thence up the Little River to the banks of Lake Nippissing, embracing both banks of the Ottawa,

³ *Imperial Immigrants: Scottish Settlers in the Upper Ottawa Valley, 1815-1840*, by Michael E. Vance (2012), ISBN 978-1-55488-756-9.

⁴ Reverend William Bell *Diary*, 1817.

*its islands, and adjacent countries, tributary streams, rivers and brooks from their sources and height of land that flow and empty themselves in said Ottawa River.*⁵



Visits by First Nations people to the emerging village of Perth appear to have been uncommon enough that they were usually cause for comment in Bell's diary.

*The Indians with their baggage passed our house on their way to the Mississippi River, ten miles distant. Each of the men carried a canoe on his head. The squaws were loaded with blankets, skins, kettles, tents, etc., like as many asses.*⁶

*Their canoes were all of birch bark, about eighteen feet long and three feet wide at the middle. They had in each canoe a capital fowling-piece, and several spring traps for taking game, and all the men were armed with the tomahawk. They had all black hair, brown complexions and active well-formed bodies. All of them, even the children, had silver ornaments in their ears.*⁷

The Algonquin families passing the Bell house at Perth were transiting a portage from the Rideau or Tay River to the Mississippi River. As a map of Lanark County shows, the shortest distance, at any point in their courses, between the Rideau, Tay and Mississippi Rivers runs directly through Perth; more-or-less along what is today the Rideau Ferry Road, County Road 511 to Balderson, and then the town-line between Drummond and Bathurst Townships to the confluence of the Fall and Mississippi Rivers. That direct route, however, was obstructed by

⁵ Algonquin Petitions to the Crown, June 1835 & August 1847.

⁶ William Bell *Diary*, August 10, 1817.

⁷ William Bell *Diary*, August 4, 1817.

several large swamps and marshes so the portage trail veered east from the Tay at Perth and followed the high ground to Mississippi Lake, tracing the approximate route of today's Tennyson Road.

As Reverend Bell made diary notes of his 'first contact', rank and file settlers were also having their first encounters with members of the Algonquin Nation. Some accounts suggest that relations between settler and Algonquin were, initially at least, essentially benign and even friendly.

*The settlers were more or less friendly with what remained of the original frequenters, and were taught by them how to make use of the maple sap for domestic use, and to convert it into the most delicious of all products for household consumption.*⁸

*The settlers were welcomed and befriended and helped through the early years of settlement.*⁹

*Omamiwinini*¹⁰ people taught the settlers about maple syrup and edible berries, as well as which herbs to use for medicinal purposes.¹¹ Stories are told of settlers who fell ill with 'the ague' and of Algonquin women who were able to save their lives. Venison was shared in times of need and the newcomers were more than glad to accept their aid.¹²

*At Pakenham Mills, George Parker, in company with three of his sons, varying from six to eleven, went into the river to bathe; the second boy slipped off a rock into deep water ... Several expert divers including Indians used every exertion to recover the body but did not succeed until nearly 10:00 at night on account of the depth of the water and uneven bottom of the river.*¹³

*The Indians are well acquainted with the hot-bath, and derive from it great cures [for Rideau Canal workmen suffering from malaria and ague]. They build it of rude stones, by the banks of a lake, or river, and in it kindle a fire, and keep it up until the stones and sand be hot; they then sprinkle some water, and bring forth the patient: having stretched him, or her, in the rude bath, water is poured against the hot stones, which flies hissing on to the body: when this is done, it is wrapt up in buffalo-skins, and a profuse sweat thereby obtained.*¹⁴

On at least one occasion the settlers at Perth reciprocated kindnesses offered, although in Reverend William Bell's account of the incident, concern for native welfare was not universal and the effort did not end particularly well.

⁸ *Perth Courier*, December 22, 1916.

⁹ Matthew Behrens, *The Leveller* Vol. 8 No. 6 (March 2016).

¹⁰ The Omamiwinini people, a part of the Anishinaabe aka Algonquin.

¹¹ Paula Sherman, *At Home in Tay Valley*, edited by Kay Rogers (2015) ISBN 978-1-77257-020-5.

¹² *The Algonquin Presence*, by Claudia Smith, *Maple Lanes Travel & Recreational Guide* (2010), Lanark Era.

¹³ *Perth Courier*, September 22, 1846.

¹⁴ *Three Years in Canada*, by John McTaggart (1829). McTaggart worked as an engineer constructing the Rideau Canal.

Dreadful are the sufferings of savages when they are left by travelling parties sick in the woods. One very cold Sabbath morning, in February, John Robson called to inform me that he had seen a female Indian at the river side, very sick, and likely to perish from exposure to the storm if not taken care of. He had been to the wardens, who are the proper guardians of the poor, both of whom pitied her with all their heart; but neither of them would do any thing for her.

The young man told me that, getting no help, he procured a horse and sleigh and brought her ... and her two children, a boy and a girl ... to the tavern kept by a widow¹⁵ ... who gave her some warm soup and put her to bed. A surgeon called, gave her some medicine and proposed to bleed her, but she refused. Indians in general have a great aversion to operations and medicine too, except their simples.

She soon began to get better, but her attendants were very troublesome to the landlady. The old Indian woman, by calling around town, got a supply of food which brought other Indians, who having got spirits all got drunk. Then they fought and the widow was obliged to turn them all out. The woman was better, the weather was fine, and they all went off to the woods.¹⁶

Occasionally, indigenous men and women aided the White settlement as wage earners. It took many years for the Settlers to accept that snakes in the Perth area were not poisonous so, as the *“Cranberry marshes were numerous but infested with snakes, the settlers often hired Indians to gather cranberries for them since they knew how to deal with the serpents.”*¹⁷

Rueben Sherwood, the surveyor in charge of laying out the Perth Military Settlement, had been a Captain of Guides during the War of 1812 and well understood the importance of indigenous knowledge. From the outset, Sherwood engaged members of First Nations to work with his survey crews, but the benefit of doing so was lost on Settlement Superintendent Alexander McDonnell when he complained that Sherwood had *“gone up the river in a canoe with an Indian for what purpose I know not”*.¹⁸ While guiding Sherwood and his men as they mapped the local waterways was effective, aboriginal men were less inclined to accept employment blazing the concession and lot lines. *“Indians were occasionally hired as chainbearers, but there is little or no record of their success as labourers. They continued for the most part to live as their forbears, hunting and fishing and camping along the waterways”*.¹⁹

Although Bell considered the native population to be *“quiet and inoffensive”*, many of the newly arrived settlers regarded them with considerable fear and trepidation and, in numerous accounts, the Algonquin are portrayed as shy and wary of the newcomers. In the summer of 1818

¹⁵ The tavern-keeper was Euphemia McGregor-Cameron (1774-1858) whose husband, Angus Cameron (1761-1822) had died a year earlier. Euphemia was the mother of Malcom Cameron (1808-1876) who founded the *Bathurst Courier* (later the *Perth Courier*) in 1834.

¹⁶ William Bell *Diary*, 1823.

¹⁷ *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, by Jean S. McGill (1968) ISBN 0-9690087-1-6.

¹⁸ Settlement Superintendent Alexander McDonnell to William Halton, Secretary to Lieutenant Governor Francis Gore, May 14, 1816

¹⁹ *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, by Jean S. McGill (1968) ISBN 0-9690087-1-6.

John Cram, from Perthshire, Scotland, took up an allotment of land in Beckwith Township near the future site of the Town of Carleton Place.

Hearing the sound of a waterfall on a still day when he and a neighbor were clearing land together, they agreed on an exploring expedition. The next day, going along old Indian trails and new surveyors' line they followed the sound until they reached the head of the [Mississippi River] falls. On arriving ... they saw a tall Indian woman leave the shore and plunge across in the shallow water to the north side, where there was an Indian camp. The next year the Indian campground became part of the farmland grants of Edmond Morphy and his family, newly arrived from Littleton in Tipperary.²⁰

In 1821 William Lang, who arrived as a 10-year-old with his family and other members of the Paisley Townhead Emigration Society via the *Earl of Buckinghamshire*, had his first encounter with aboriginal inhabitants. While making their way along the Mississippi River to their land grant in Ramsay Township (C-1/L-14), his family,

... stopped at an island, and while preparing a meal a big Indian hove in sight coming towards the camp in majestic strides. Instantly stories of blood-thirsty doings of these wily savages flashed across the minds of the company and fear filled every heart. Equal to the occasion, however, was the late John Streele, who was one of the party, and he seized a huge loaf of bread and presented it to the Indian as an evidence of their friendly intentions. The peace offering was not accepted, and the Indian passed by on his way to his camp on another part of the island and paid no attention to them, but they breathed easier when he was out of sight.²¹

Even Reverend William Bell's horse seems to have been wary of "Indians"; or, as likely, made nervous by sensing Bell's own unease.

Some horses display great alarm at the sight and even the smell of Indians. One day when I was driving to Lanark I met some of the aborigines, at which my mare took fright, ran off the road and nearly dashed the sleigh to pieces. Another day Indians passed behind her one hundred yards away. She smelt them and began to snort and start so that she could not be pacified.²²

That the First Nations inhabitants were often tolerant of the newly arrived settlers, but kept their distance, was demonstrated on another occasion when Bell's horse shied.

²⁰ Howard Morton Brown, *Carleton Place Canadian*, August 13, 1939 & March 29, 1856.

²¹ *Imperial immigrants: Scottish Settlers in the Upper Ottawa Valley, 1815-1840* by Michael E. Vance (2012) ISBN 978-1-55488-756-9, quoting *Sketch of the life of William Lang, Carleton Place Herald*, February 9, 1938 [LAC].

²² William Bell *Diary*, February 1, 1824.

On my way home, I fell in with a company of Indians who, as usual, nearly frightened my mare out of her wits. She began to snort and caper and in spite of me turned back. The natives, on seeing my dilemma, with politeness which would have done honour to civilized people, went off the road till I passed.²³



Reverend Bell also noted, however, that Algonquin frequenting the area of the Perth Settlement were troubled by the rapidly expanding settler occupation of their land.

At present the settlement is extending along the banks of the Mississippi (not the great river of that name,) a large river eight miles to the north of Perth. The Indians call it Mississippi, or rather Massa Sappa, which signifies any large river.²⁴

The Mississippi Lake is eight miles to the north of Perth. Some of the islands in the lake are still inhabited by Indians, whose hunting ground is on the north side, and who are far from being pleased with the encroachments our settlers are making on their territories.²⁵



Despite their displeasure with so many strangers disturbing and destroying the forests of what had become the townships of Bathurst, Beckwith, Drummond and North Elmsley, the First Nations did, on occasion, have the benefit of some entertainment offered by the settlers.

²³ William Bell *Diary*, August 1825.

²⁴ William Bell *Diary*, 1817.

²⁵ *Hints to Immigrants, Letter XXIII*, William Bell, 1824.

We [Reverend William Bell and party] *reached the river, opposite Mr. Haig's house. He saw us and came with his canoe to take us across, but he upset it, went down head foremost, and got a hearty ducking. This afforded grand sport to a camp of Indians close by. They laughed and clapped their hands in high glee.*²⁶

The Algonquin First Nation, upon whose territory the Perth Settlement had sprung up, were, however, indeed *"far from being pleased"*.

*The native people soon became disillusioned ... as more and more land was cleared. They could no longer assume they had the right to land their canoes to prepare a meal or sleep, and they had to ask permission to come ashore where they had been landing for centuries. Often, they were chased away by homesteaders.*²⁷

In January 1819, Acting Settlement Superintendent Daniel Daverne (1784-1830) advised his superiors that *"an Indian"* had appeared in his office *"... upon the subject of their chiefs and the other persons claiming the land we occupy at present as having been their hunting ground"*²⁸, and in March he reported a visit from *"two other chiefs, Nias Muawisgunstih and Constant Pinelse"* who were *"very pressing with respect to their claims for remuneration for the lands we at present occupy at this place"*.²⁹

While Algonquin oral tradition recalls *"Omamiwinini"*³⁰ *people rescuing orphaned children*³¹, folk-tales of kidnapped children are a recurring theme in early Settler accounts.

When Mrs. Robinson [nee Vandusen] was a little girl [c1820], she and her younger brother were returning home through a dense wood from a visit to a relative a short distance away when they got separated and the boy got lost. A search party turned out to look for him but he was never found and it was thought that a party of Indians in camp at the place had kidnapped him, but a search through the camp failed to find him.

*About five years ago [c1885] a tall stranger with sandy whiskers and complexion and bearing a strong family resemblance to the Vandusens dropped down in Smith's Falls, but he could not speak any English so no information was gotten out of him. It was thought he spoke an old Indian tongue but though several Indians tried to talk to him they could not understand him. After staying around here for some time he disappeared without leaving a clue as to his identity. It was thought by many of the old settlers that he was the lost Vandusen child.*³²

²⁶ William Bell *Diary*, September 26, 1819.

²⁷ *The Algonquin Presence*, by Claudia Smith, *Maple Lanes Travel & Recreational Guide* (2010), Lanark Era.

²⁸ At that point, British authorities had been engaged in negotiations for the purchase/surrender of the Perth Settlement tract since February 1816 but the treaty was not signed until May 1822. Moreover, the British negotiated with, and purchased the land from, the Mississauga Nation (who did not hold rightful claim) while excluding the Algonquin Nation (who did hold rightful claim). The men visiting Daverne were Algonquin, but their claim would not be recognized until 1992.

²⁹ Daniel Daverne to Colonel John Ferguson, Indian Affairs, Kingston; quoted from *Duty, Conspiracy, Obsession* – Clark Theobald (2011).

³⁰ An alternate name for the Algonquin people.

³¹ Paula Sherman, *At Home in Tay Valley*, edited by Kay Rogers (2015) ISBN 978-1-77257-020-5.

³² *Perth Courier*, January 25, 1889.

Another tale, dating to the very earliest days of the Perth Settlement, explains another story of disappearance-reappearance as a case of “stolen by an Indian”.

Mr. Nicholas Garland, farmer, then living on Lot 20 in the 6th Concession of Beckwith Township, lost a child, a little girl. Some of the children had wandered to the back of the clearance, which was then but small, and the little one never came home. All the neighbors turned out the next day and searched the woods all around, and every nook and cranny where she might have fallen and perished was searched, but not the smallest clue or trace of her could be found and the inhabitants concluded that a bear had carried her off and devoured her.

It now appears that she was stolen by an Indian who brought her up in his own family and got her married to one of his own sons and they lived latterly in the County of Bruce where some of her brothers and sisters are living. The old Indian, her abductor, died recently and before his death made a full confession of the nefarious and cruel deed. Who need despair of at least hearing of their own lost loved ones.³³

In a settlement where stories of abducted children were common currency, at least one mother, with a particular fear of native Canadians, went to considerable lengths to protect her brood, including moving away from a nearby Indian camp.

Near the foot of Millar’s Lake lies Letts landing, on the north shore [of the Mississippi River near Snow Road] ... just around the corner going downstream ... Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Adam (weavers), who came out from Scotland, ... lived in a little log house in a clearing near Green Landing.

Their home being near the Indian’s camping ground, they were often visited by them. These Indians wanted to trade bead work, venison, furs and fish for meat and potatoes ... Mrs. Adam was scared of these Indians, not only for her own sake, but because of her children. When she would see the Indians coming, she would have one of the older children take the young ones into a back bedroom out of sight, as it was heard that the Indians were not averse to stealing babies. Because of the fear, the Adam family traded farms with James and Granny Millar.³⁴

³³ *Perth Courier*, December 16, 1881.

³⁴ *The Canadian Mississippi River*, by Hilda Geddes (1988) ISBN 0-9-9693544-0-1.

There is, of course, no verifiable evidence that any children were ever “kidnapped by Indians” at the Perth Settlement; in fact, quite the opposite. Alex M. Richey (b.c1827), an early resident of Bathurst Township, confirmed the Omamiwinini oral tradition of lost or orphaned white children sheltered, at least temporarily, by First Nations families.



Algonquin Mother and Child

The first that I remember of the [Joshua] Adams³⁵ family was ... in the year 1833 ... They were all very kind to me, a new boy, just from the banks of the Clyde, Lanark Village.

There were a number of Indians about the headwaters of the Tay River at the time. They went down to the Lake of Two Mountains every spring to sell their furs. In the fall, they returned to their various hunting grounds. They passed our place with six or eight canoes, loaded with their families and goods, a union Jack at the bow and stern of each canoe; and some years they camped on our place for a few days and killed a deer or two.

When the Indians got as far as the Captain's [Adams], he was on the watch for them for they most always had a white child picked up in some way or given to them by some unfortunate mother. The Captain saved several and brought them up to be cared for as one of the family.³⁶

That many of the earliest settlers at Perth feared the aboriginal people, and generally avoided contact wherever possible, can be largely put down to *Brewster's Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, edited by Dr. David Brewster (1781-1868) and published in 18 volumes between 1808 and 1830³⁷. When the Edinburgh Proclamation, offering government assisted emigration to Upper Canada, was published in 1815, the Government Commissioner for Emigration in Scotland, John Campbell Sr. (1778-1866), recommended *Brewster's Encyclopaedia* to would-be emigrants as the best source of information about the colony.

The Encyclopaedia entry for Canada totalled 28 pages and provided a wealth of information on the colonies' history, climate, peoples, customs, government, laws, economy and trade. Within the history section, however, was an account of the French and Indian War (1754-1763)³⁸, including a full page “eye witness”³⁹ description of the massacre of the British garrison at Fort William Henry in 1757. The unnamed “eye witness” is quoted in graphic detail describing

³⁵ Joshua Adams (1779-1863).

³⁶ Alex M. Richey (b.c1827), letter to the editor *Perth Courier*, July 28, 1911.

³⁷ Published by William Blackwood.

³⁸ The North American theater of the Seven Years' War 1754-1763.

³⁹ The 'eye witness' was not named.

how, following the surrender of about 2,300 British troops and their dependents, 2,000 First Nations warriors serving with the General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm's (1712-1759) French Army,

... attacked the sick and wounded [who amid] shrieks and groans were dispatched ... murdered without distinction ... stripped of their arms and clothes. Those who made the least resistance felt the weight of the tomahawks. Men, women and children [were] dispatched in the most cruel and wanton manner and immediately scalped. Many of the savages drank the blood of their victims as it flowed warm from their fatal wounds. 1,500 persons were killed or made prisoner by these savages⁴⁰ ... many of the latter carried off and never returned.⁴¹

Elsewhere in his encyclopaedia Brewster informed his readers that,

The Indians who inhabit the settled parts of Canada, are greatly degenerated in many of the noble characteristics of the more savage tribes; and they are represented as dirty, diminutive, half-naked, excessively stupid in their appearance, and altogether most miserable looking creatures.⁴²

Many of the immigrants who came to the Perth Settlement from 1815 onward had taken Campbell's advice and read the *Brewster Encyclopaedia* entry on Canada. Those who had not read it first-hand, heard of its contents from those who had. As the Fort William Henry massacre story was told and re-told in Glasgow pubs before departure and during the long boring voyage to Canada, the horrors of the tale were embellished and details muddled. A single incident from 50 years earlier became, in the minds of many, a common daily occurrence in the strange new land.

For some, this engendered not just paranoia, but stoked rabidly hostile and racist attitudes toward "Redskins". A case in point was John Oliver (1775-1822) who operated a ferry boat across the Rideau River south of Perth and founded the village of Oliver's Ferry, later renamed Rideau Ferry. Oliver was,

... a hard drinking, hardworking, rough talking and slightly dishonest character-about-town ... "I will shoot me the first Indian I see" Oliver once boasted after a scuffle with a redskin. He did just that, but his victim was a harmless squaw walking through the forest. Several days later Oliver was found butchered about four miles from his home. The dead squaw's husband had tracked down Oliver and killed him in best Indian fashion.⁴³

⁴⁰ About 200 were killed, and 700 taken prisoner, 500 of whom the French were able to rescue before they were carried off by the Iroquois warriors.

⁴¹ *Brewster's Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, Vol-5, Page 325-326.

⁴² *Brewster's Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, Vol-5, Page 344..

⁴³ *Perth Courier*, October 4, 1962.



Oliver's Ferry c1820

Illustrative as this tale may be, of the extremes to which misinformation could lead, in fact, no such double murder ever happened. The story, and others like it, seems to have grown out of the fact that John Oliver was indeed a cantankerous man, that his brother, William, was shot to death in a dispute with neighbors, and that John himself committed suicide in 1822. His threat to “shoot the first Indian I see” was probably real enough, however; with its genesis in *Brewster Encyclopaedia* and what Reverend William Bell, called Oliver’s “lunacy”.

Of course, not all settlers feared First Nations’ people, or considered them suspect, and in time others came to understand that the savagery at Fort William Henry was unlikely to be repeated at the Perth. There was even some appreciation of the negative impact European immigration was having on the First Nations way of life. Writing home to Glasgow in 1821 two new arrivals observed that,

*As to the Indians you have nothing to fear. I have never heard of any injury they do to any person.*⁴⁴

*The Canadians [Quebecois] are, in general, as simple, harmless, and hardy a set of people as live, and the Indians more so; in both cases, the adventurous fugitives and emigrants from Europe, have grievously corrupted them.*⁴⁵

⁴⁴ A letter “from an Emigrant in Upper Canada (by trade a mason) to his friends in Glasgow” dated Caledonia, October 8, 1820, published in *A Narrative of the Rise & Progress of Emigration from the Counties of Lanark & Renfrew to the New Settlement in Upper Canada, on Government Grant*, by Robert Lamond (1821).

⁴⁵ A letter “from H. L. to his Correspondent in Glasgow”, dated Montreal May 23, 1821, published in *A Narrative of the Rise & Progress of Emigration from the Counties of Lanark & Renfrew to the New Settlement in Upper Canada, on Government Grant*, by Robert Lamond (1821).

Nevertheless, while Oliver may not have shot “a *harmless squaw*”, violence perpetrated by Whites against native women did occur. In 1835, when Perth was still the District administrative capital and judicial seat, its jail hosted three men charged with a sexual assault at Bytown,

*Jerry Ryan, John Hoolahan, Michael Hoolahan, committed for having, violently assaulted and ravished and old squaw. The squaw and her child were also sent to Perth to secure their evidence.*⁴⁶

Tried in the local court house, the men were convicted, but rather than the maximum possible sentence of death⁴⁷, were merely banished from Upper Canada. Whether the much lighter sentence would have been applied had the assault victim been White is not clear, but Jerry Ryan did not take the matter very seriously.

*On Sunday last, an old offender named Jeremiah Ryan, who was some time ago convicted of a gross and brutal assault upon an Indian woman, and sentenced to be banished from the Province for seven years, chose to make his appearance here without leave asked or given ... he was promptly secured and put in the hands of the Sheriff. He was transmitted to Perth gaol, where he will no doubt have the benefit of the alternative of his former sentence, which was, we understand, that in case he returned from banishment before his time, he should go to Penitentiary for life.*⁴⁸

While the Settlers seem to have had minimal concern for the temporal well-being of the dispossessed Algonquin, there was considerable interest in their spiritual welfare and seeing the “savages” adopt White lifestyles.

A gentleman from this town [Perth] having some business at the rear of the township of Bedford [Frontenac County], was compelled to take up his abode at an Indian wigwam, and, as he had very lately seen some bad and unruly savages he was much alarmed ...

He was, however, agreeably disappointed ... he found his evening meal got ready in a clean and tidy manner – his bed prepared, with two new blankets that had never been used – and oh! Cheering to relate – he saw the red man of the woods – the poor despised Indian, who but a few years ago, had but the debasing hope of a sensual paradise, take a Bible from his shelf and address his maker in the language of prayer, and express his

⁴⁶ *Bathurst Courier*, May 15, 1835.

⁴⁷ In 1838 three crimes were subject to a possible death sentence; murder, rape and treason.

⁴⁸ *Bathurst Courier*, August 10, 1838.

hopes of that eternal rest promised to all who believe in Jesus ChristIs not this an instance, that should stir up the people of this place, to aid the good work – in assisting the Missionary and Bible Societies ... in behalf of the oppressed and injured Indians, once the Lord's of all this country – now driven back year after year, and too often the dupes of the deceitful trader or tavern keeper – while no man careth for their souls ... the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society care for them. I hope the rich Episcopalians and Presbyterians⁴⁹ many see that they too are bound to care for them ... “Love thy neighbour as thy-self”. - Veritas⁵⁰



Methodist Circuit Rider

Shortly after publishing the above letter, with an eye to ensuring that local First Nations people did not fall “dupes of the deceitful tavern keeper” a notice in the *Perth Courier* reminded grog shop operators of the prevailing law.

*The attention of Tavern Keepers and those selling Spirituous Liquors is particularly directed to 3rd Victoria, Chapter 13, Clause 1st viz: that ... it shall not be lawful for any person to sell, barter, exchange, or give to any Indian man, woman or child ... any kind of Spirituous Liquor ... or to cause or procure the same to be done for any purpose whatever, under the pains and penalties to be inflicted by the authority of this act.*⁵¹

Just as Methodist circuit-riding preachers were the most active missionaries among settlers isolated on their Bathurst District bush lots, so too were they at the vanguard of proselytization among the First Nations. Interest in their efforts at Perth may have been considerable, but it apparently did not translate into much financial support.

*Methodist Missionary Society – the Perth branch of this society, held its annual meeting on Tuesday evening last in the Methodist Church. The house was more numerously attended than any former occasion, owing, most probably, to an innate curiosity elicited by the appearance of the Rev. Peter Jones⁵², alias Kahkewaquonaby, a converted Indian Chief of the Chippewa tribe, rather than any other cause – for the collection taken up was but trifling in comparison to the number present ... The anecdotes and facts narrated by Mr. Jones, of his forest brethren, were full of a lively and thrilling interest. The amount contributed toward the fund was upwards of £6 – in Bytown at the Missionary meeting there £25 was collected.*⁵³

⁴⁹ Although Presbyterian Reverend William Bell was, by far, the most active and energetic Christian minister at Perth, serving the settlement for 40 years, he seems to have made no efforts among the indigenous people. He made essentially ‘tourist’ visits to “the Indian village upon the river Credit” in 1829 and the “Indian settlement on Grape Island” (Rice Lake) in 1830, but seems to have left proselytizing First Nations to the Methodists.

⁵⁰ Letter to the Editor, *Perth Courier*, March 4, 1836.

⁵¹ *Perth Courier*, January 1, 1841.

⁵² Peter Jones aka Kahkewaquonāby (1802-1856), was not Chippewa but the son of a Welsh father, Augustus Jones, and a Mississauga mother, Tuhbenahneequay.

⁵³ *Perth Courier*, February 15, 1839.

By the time the Perth Settlement reached its half-century mark, First Nations people and their culture had become little more than a novelty to be learned about through an “*instructive entertainment*” at the local music hall where, in 1863, “*Warrior Och-Tach-Wah-Lah’s*” touring “*Grand Indian Exhibition*”, featuring “*two young girls, Neoskaleta and Ochtahma*”, could be enjoyed for 20 cents, or just 10 cents for children.

*As will be observed by an advertisement in another column, a young Indian Chief and troupe are to give an exhibition in the Music Hall this (Friday) evening. The programme offers a very good instructive entertainment consisting of the reproduction of scenes depicting the most stirring incident of Indian savage life, such as the manner in which wild horses, buffalo, &c., are taken in the hunt, Indian marriage ceremony, worship, sacrifices, merry-making, &c. The celebrated Historical scene of “Pocahontas” is to be produced, along with many other interesting incidents, the whole to be agreeably interspersed with Indian fun, music, dances and songs.*⁵⁴

In 1869 the *Montreal Witness*, commenting on recently released Government statistics, lamented that the First Nations seemed to be disappearing.

*In looking over a comparative statement of the population of several Indian tribes and bands throughout Canada for the year 1868, it is impossible not to be struck with figures telling of the scanty remnants of a once numerous, and, in their way, powerful nation. To begin with the province of Ontario; about 11,500 represent the whole number of Indians therein, and some 180 their increase during the year in question. Amongst the tribes most numerous are the Chippewas, Mohawks and Six Nations.*⁵⁵

One might question how accurately government enumerators and statisticians had captured First Nations’ population data but, of that recorded Ontario population of only 11,500, the Algonquin were not among the “*most numerous*”. Three years later the 1871 Dominion of Canada census counted only 23,037 “*Indians*” in all four provinces (Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia) and in South Lanark⁵⁶ District found only 17 out of a total population of 18,130, all of them resident in the Township of Montague.

Where had Lanark County’s indigenous peoples gone? In 1844 reserves were created in neighboring Frontenac County, granting Algonquin bands ‘Licenses of Occupation’, but not ‘ownership’ of the land.

The Shabot Obadjiwan (Algonquin) First Nation were directed to re-settle on a tract of land in the Bedford Township, but chose to remain on their home territory in the area of Sharbot Lake, without legally recognized right or title.

⁵⁴ *Perth Courier*, March 8, 1863.

⁵⁵ *Perth Courier*, November 5, 1869, quoting the *Montreal Witness*.

⁵⁶ Townships of Montague, North Elmsley, North Burgess, South Sherbrooke, Bathurst, Drummond, Beckwith, and Towns of Perth, Smiths Falls and Carleton Place.

An Ardoch Algonquin First Nation reserve was created near Crow and Bob's Lake⁵⁷, but within a decade the tract was destroyed by illegal logging and in the 1850s the land was sold to settlers by the Colonial Government. The Ardoch Algonquin were then told to move and join an Algonquin band living around a Hudson Bay Company post at Golden Lake, South Algona Township, Renfrew County, but most remained in Frontenac County without right or title to land.

In 1873, the Algonquin community at Golden Lake became the Pikwakanagan Reserve, 1,745 acres on the shores of Bonnechere River but, as in Frontenac, their occupancy was recognized only by a 'Certificate of Possession', not ownership.⁵⁸

Over the decades from 1853, most Algonquins on the Quebec side of the valley also found themselves confined to ever shrinking reserves⁵⁹. Deprived of their livelihoods in geographic and economic isolation the reserves bred social and physical destruction. In 1875 the *Perth Courier* reported;

*A gentleman from Picknock [Picanoc⁶⁰], on the Gatineau River, brings information that small pox is raging among the Indians to an awful extent. There, on the 25th inst., nine bodies of children lying unburied, and the unfortunate Indians are in a pitiful state of destitution. The male portion of the community are either dead or have left the place, only squaws being left. There is no surgeon at hand, and the cases are of the most malignant type.*⁶¹

Within two decades of Och-Tach-Wah-Lah's minstrel show version of "Indian savage life", the local Algonquin Nations' rights to their traditional hunting grounds had been effectively, if not legally, extinguished.



*Last Wednesday [October 1, 1884] two Indians from St. Regis were about to pack up their camp between Appleton and Almonte, on the Mississippi river, when a representative of the Carleton Place Game, Fish and Insectivorous Birds Protective Society appeared and confiscated a number of muskrat skins. The fellows had been warned by the Society to desist trapping the animals until November. The two offenders were brought to Carleton Place. They had in their possession 126 muskrat skins, one mink skin and one racoon skin. The poor fellows were in most destitute circumstances. The magistrate inflicted a fine of \$10 and costs and the skins were confiscated.*⁶²

⁵⁷ Townships of Central Frontenac and South Frontenac (Bedford District) in Frontenac County, and the Township of Tay Valley in Lanark County.

⁵⁸ Under the Indian Act of 1876, First Nations people were specifically prohibited from receiving free grants of land offered to White settlers.

⁵⁹ Kitgan Zibi and Lac-Rapide in Outaouais Region and Timiskaming, Kebaowek, Lac-Simon and Pikogan in Abitibi-Temiscamingue Region.

⁶⁰ Wright Township, Outaouais, Quebec

⁶¹ *Perth Courier*, January 15, 1875

⁶² *Carleton Place Herald*, October 8, 1884.

When the Perth Settlement celebrated its centennial in 1916, the presence of First Nations people in the immediate area was recalled only through artifacts left at their traditional camp sites, and even who they were had been forgotten.

The Cree Indians [sic⁶³] ... had been the only human being to use and frequent the prolific wilds in the vast expanse of this part of Ontario, and who have left their marks of occupation on the shores of Otty, Rideau, Christy, Dalhousie and Mississippi and other of our lakes in this country, in the way of pottery, flint arrow heads, stone implements of war, hunting and domestic use, and of other pieces of their handiworks now in the collections of antiquarian fanciers, in the museums, or in a hundred private houses.⁶⁴

Another century would pass before descendants of the Perth (and other) settlers came to fully recognize that, while First Nations people may not have been “*numerous in the neighborhood*”, they had none-the-less been possessors of that neighborhood from time immemorial. The colonial usurpation of their land, with little or no compensation, was not formally acknowledged until 1992 when the Governments of Canada and Ontario finally recognized the Algonquin land claim by entering into settlement negotiations. In December 2012 those negotiations produced a ‘Preliminary Draft Agreement-in-Principle’ and, following stakeholder and public consultation, a proposed ‘Agreement-in-Principle’ (AIP) was announced in June 2015. Voting in early 2016 the Algonquin First Nation overwhelmingly endorsed the AIP and it was approved by all three parties (Canada, Ontario, and the Algonquins) on October 18, 2016. Negotiations toward a final agreement are ongoing.⁶⁵

- **Ron W. Shaw (2017)**

⁶³ The Cree Nation was/is centered north and west of Lake Superior in northern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories with a smaller group in Quebec.

⁶⁴ *Perth Courier*, December 22, 1916.

⁶⁵ The Algonquin Land Claim AIP covers 36,000 square kilometers in Eastern Ontario, including Perth and all of Lanark County. The envisioned agreement would transfer 117,500 acres of Crown land to Algonquin ownership and provide a \$300 million settlement. It will also address harvesting, hunting, fishing and forestry rights, as well as Algonquin heritage and cultural eligibility for enrollment.