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Understanding History and Relationships

[Letter to the Editor](#)

Ron Pethick brought up some interesting points in his letter to the editor regarding particular understandings of history: Algonquin and Mohawk relations in the 17th century, Proclamation of 1763, 18th century land cessions by the Mississauga people, as well as contemporary Algonquin relationships with the Crown, province, and local neighbours. I was particularly impressed with the point that he made regarding the genocide that was committed against Scottish and Irish people by the British historically and how they would be entitled to "complain" about that treatment to the United Nations. Ron is very correct in pointing out that Scottish and Irish peoples do have a right to educate the public about that genocide and yes, seek compensation, if they so desire. Genocide is genocide, and Ardoch Algonquin First Nation would be happy to support their efforts to pursue that if they choose.

When it comes to understanding what has happened here in Algonquin territory over the past 400 years, Ron has the same handicap as many other Canadians. That handicap is the history that has been taught to Ron and other Canadians. This history was written using documents that were created by Europeans. Those Europeans were interested in gaining control over Indigenous people's lands and resources, therefore their understandings of the past are influenced by their desire to profit from our lands and resources. As a result of that history, Algonquin people have been marginalized to the fringes of Canadian society and the true nature of Canada's relationship with us remains hidden from the public. This can be seen in elementary and secondary history text books where all Indigenous peoples in Canada receive minimal coverage. We only appear as noble Indians who were deemed to disappear, or as brutal savages who infested the banks of the rivers. Every word that was created about us in the pages of European writings was designed to create a image of us in a negative way that were permit Europeans to occupy and exploit our resources for themselves.

It was only through a process of decolonizing my own mind as an adult that I was able to see past the whitewash that has passed as the actual history of this continent. In the spirit of furthering that decolonization in other people, I would like to offer the following comments on the topics Ron's letter to the editor.

First of all, Dave Bate was correct in stating that Algonquin people were not conquered by military action on the part of the French, English, or Dutch. At least not in the same way that Indigenous peoples were tortured and killed in the West and in the US. Nor were Algonquin people conquered and driven off their lands by the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois). In fact most of what is in the history texts about Algonquin/Mohawk relations is absolutely incorrect. Algonquin and Mohawk peoples had relationships with each other as human beings that reflected the relationships they had with the rest of the

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Natural World. Any shift in that relationship was the result of the French and the English playing us against each other so that they could both gain access to our resources (ie... furs).

Secondly, the Proclamation of 1763 was a direct result of Pontiac and his followers near Detroit who had successfully resisted British encroachments on their lands by destroying 14 British forts. The Proclamation was issued by the King of England to prevent further encroachments on ALL Indigenous peoples lands within the territory claimed by the British. This was understood by Algonquins at the time as a guarantee of their rights and title. This understanding was also recognized by several British officials in the late 18th and the 19th century. Sir John Johnson even signed the Proclamation and gave it to Algonquin leaders as proof that it guaranteed Algonquin title and rights within Algonquin territory.

Thirdly, Ron told us about the land cessions by the Mississauga people in the early 19th century, and yes that definitely happened. The Mississauga people did agree to sell some of their land to the British Crown. It is the way in which that cession happened that explains the sale of Algonquin land. Oral and documentary evidence shows that the treaty commissioners tricked the Mississaugas into ceding Algonquin land in the following manner. Commissioners pulled in the oldest men in the region and put a map in front of them and pointed to areas on the map and said to them "have you ever hunted here or there".....until they were all the way up past the Kiji Sibi (Ottawa). Mississauga elders admitted that yes they had hunted and fished all the way up to the Kiji Sibi, with the approval of Algonquin people. They even told the commissioners that it was Algonquin land, but the commissioners told them that it was ok if they sold Algonquin land. Additionally I should point out that the Mississaugas are still waiting for full payment from the government.

There was clear and concise evidence at the time of that land cession, including petitions from Algonquin leaders, and British official correspondence that shows the British knew Algonquin title and rights were still in effect. Therefore, Ron is incorrect when he states that the government did not recognize Algonquin title and rights. The government knew very well that it was Algonquin land and even talked about ways to protect remaining lands while also compensating Algonquin people for the lands already taken for settlement. The only way the lands could be purchased legitimately was through the guidelines set out in the Proclamation. So regardless of whether or not Mississauga people ceded land to the Crown, Algonquin land was never legitimately purchased from Algonquin people. Algonquin people did not surrender, sell, or otherwise dispose of their territory to the British Crown. Nor was it ever transferred to Canada after Confederation. As a result, Algonquin territory is not under the jurisdiction of Ontario or Canada , it is under the jurisdiction of Algonquins.

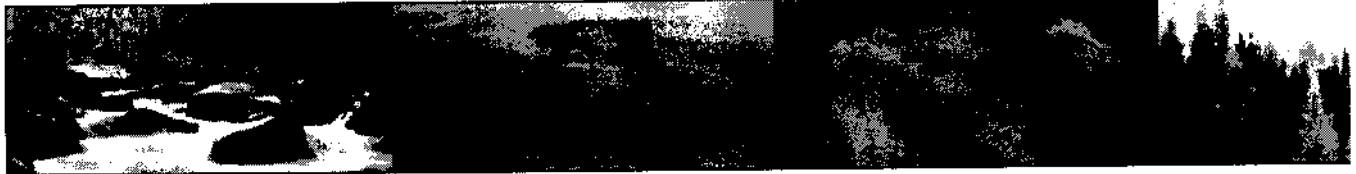
Ron wondered why we were not participating in the claims process like other Algonquins. This has already been addressed previously, but I will point out some of the major obstacles that prevent our participation. To begin with, the land claims and treaty process is designed to eliminate our autonomy within our territory. We do not agree that this land claim is in our best interest. It is Canada who wrongfully occupies our lands and supposedly exploits our resources (along with other Indigenous peoples) for the benefit of the entire Nation. Indigenous peoples for the most part do not benefit from this exploitation and remain the poorest of all people in Canada . Most live below the poverty line in unsafe housing and drink unsafe water because of the ways in which mining companies have contaminated the land and water in many regions. In addition, many of our elders go hungry and cannot afford the medication they need to live a healthy life because of this inequality. The fact remains that Canada continues to prosper as a nation from the resources stolen from our lands every day while Indigenous peoples continue to suffer on a daily basis.

Another obstacle to our participation is the discriminatory requirement that we hold

elections to send a reprehensive to the negotiation table. Elections compromise our traditional governance practices which are based on consensus. Forcing us to do so is against numerous international human rights legislation and constitutes genocide on the part of the government. Another factor that calls into question the legitimacy of the claims process for us is the fact that if we were to participate we would be limited to one person at the table while Pikwakanagan is allowed to have the Chief and entire Council as representatives for that community. This practice is discriminatory because it establishes a hierarchy where Algonquin people must compete with each other for the little bit of land that will remain of our territory because of the extinguishment clause in the treaty process.

These are insurmountable obstacles that prevent our participation in the land claims process as it currently exists. We cannot compromise our responsibilities to our elders, women, and children. Ultimately we cannot compromise our relationship with the land. We need the land to maintain our traditions and spirituality. We cannot do this by extinguishing our autonomy through a claims process that is discriminatory. Therefore the path we follow is one in which we continue to use our lands and resources within the guidelines of Algonquin Law. This does not mean that we cannot live in harmony with our neighbours. We have every intention of supporting the efforts of year round residents and cottagers to enjoy their lives to the fullest. We have always shared our lands with others, all we ask is that you give us the same consideration and support our efforts to live our lives as distinct human beings who have connections to this land that go back thousands of years.

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Pine Lake residents meet with AAFNA

by Jeff Green



The August long weekend is the prime of the summer cottage season, but on Saturday August 5 about 35 residents of Pine Lake , near Ardoch in North Frontenac Township , put their summer fun on hold, starting their weekend with a dose of Aboriginal politics

In a meeting with the leadership of the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation (AAFNA) at the Ompah Hall, Pine Lake dwellers had their first public opportunity to air their opinions about AAFNA's building project at a public boat launch on Pine Lake .

At the start of the meeting, Pine Lake resident David Rose gave the floor to AAFNA's communications team leader and co-chief Robert Lovelace, who made a short presentation outlining the history that led up to the construction project, and said AAFNA would like to work with the residents of Pine Lake in a neighbourly way as they move forward.

"You didn't start off that way when you didn't tell us what you were doing until after you started. We got a notice from you after the chainsaws and bulldozer had done their work," said one resident. "That didn't exactly put us in the position to co-operate with you. It would have been in your best interest and our best interest to meet before the bulldozer went to work."

"We put you in that position, and I apologise for that," Lovelace responded. "We really didn't know what the MNR was going to do when we started. We thought they might intervene as soon as we started. They didn't, as it turned out, but we didn't know that, and that's why we gave less notice to Pine Lake residents than we would have liked."

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Lovelace then reported that meetings have been taking place between AAFNA and the MNR about the Pine Lake project. "We are still in negotiations with the MNR. They are not going very well. We had hoped for a mutual recognition agreement," he said.

As reported in recent editions of the News, AAFNA began clearing land for a community centre and Pow Wow grounds at Pine Lake on July 7th. AAFNA had met with North Frontenac Council reps in late June to inform them of their plans, and with officials from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) on June 27th.

The MNR oversees the land where the building site is located in their role as administrators of "Crown land", and told AAFNA that they would need a land use permit to build there.

The status of "Crown land" in all of the territory within the Ottawa and Mattawa river basins has been the subject of the Algonquin/Canada land claim process that has been underway for almost 15 years, and there never has been a treaty between the Algonquins and Canadians ceding that land to Canada.

Calling the land "Algonquin land", AAFNA sees no reason to seek MNR permission to build on it. "We will nonetheless meet or exceed building code and environmental standards with this project, and we welcome the MNR to work with us," said Bob Lovelace. "Why Pine Lake?" asked David Rose, expressing the views of many of the people at the meeting. "It is a beautiful lake, but it's a small lake."

"It is a beautiful lake," concurred Lovelace, "and we've been looking at Pine Lake and other locations for six years. The choice of Pine Lake was made this spring. We know the decision was made without consulting you, but remember this is a reality we have been living with for many, many years."

An artist's conception of the community centre had been prepared and was available for viewing at the end of the meeting, and Robert Lovelace said that architect's drawings are being prepared.

"Don't you think all of these things, and a site plan and septic plans, should have all been done before you began clearing the land?" David Rose said. "Why not halt the project right now, and do a proper environmental assessment to make sure this won't harm the lake."

AAFNA did not agree to his request, but it was proposed that a committee of residents be set up to meet with AAFNA on an ongoing basis, and Lovelace said AAFNA would be pleased to work with the committee.

"The township has appointed the mayor, Ron Maguire, who is here today," Lovelace said pointing to the back of the hall, "and he has come to one of our meetings, which are open to all. We want to work with the township and the residents of the lake, and the surrounding area."

Some of the surrounding residents didn't seem very open to working with AAFNA at Pine Lake. Glen Manion, a contractor who lives at the corner of Ardoch Road and Hwy. 506 not far from Pine Lake, said that on July 7th AAFNA supporters were parked right on Ardoch Road and had been harassing him as he drove his large work truck past the site several times, in the course of transferring materials during his work day.

"That's a public road I was using. It's a major road. They weren't only parked there, they were leaving their doors open to the road. And then they started taking pictures of the sign on my truck, and I ended up with the OPP at my door. I supported you in the past,

but not this time," he said.

Many of the Pine Lake residents expressed concerns over the future. "You say you are going to build this hall and Pow Wow grounds in a safe way, and I appreciate what you have said here today, but in 10 years you may not be here and someone might say - now we want to use more land for another purpose - and we will again be wondering what is going to happen to our lake," said one of the residents.

"It's a very small, very quiet lake," said another, and I don't think a building that can hold 100 people built so close to the lake is a good idea. I don't want this on Pine Lake. I just don't."

Although nothing was resolved at the meeting, it provided an opportunity for people to speak directly about their concerns. It is unclear what the next steps will be, but there was talk of a further meeting among Pine Lake residents.