

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FIRST NATIONS IN THE CALEDON AREA

Referred to in our land acknowledgement

All excerpts below taken from “Land Acknowledgements Decoded” by Erin Fitzgibbon, In The Hills (Spring), Vol 29 No. 1 2022

Respectfully acknowledging the original and longstanding connection of Indigenous peoples to the land we all now occupy is central to land acknowledgments. But are these words sincere pledges that will bring about change? Or are they, as some critics contend, mere tokenism in lieu of meaningful action? The release in 2015 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action highlighted 94 steps that must be taken to right centuries of wrongs and restore awareness of the defining role of Indigenous peoples in the history of Canada. The oral repetition of land acknowledgments is intended to promote mindful reflection, encouraging people to ask questions and educate themselves as a positive first step on the road to reconciliation.

For Indigenous peoples, the values of reciprocity, balance and respect are inextricably intertwined with their unique and enduring relationships with the land. But these relationships were brutally disrupted by colonization, with its forced relocations and territorial seizures, residential schools, compelled assimilation, and genocide. Land acknowledgments recognize that the ancestral and continuing connection of Indigenous peoples to the land is embedded in their cultural and spiritual identity. The Canadian Constitution affirms these relationships by acknowledging Indigenous peoples’ “Aboriginal rights” – inherent rights that flow from their ancestors’ traditions and culture. These rights may be different from the rights defined in treaties and can, for example, include the right to self-government.

The Tionontati, or People of the Hills, were called **Pétun** by early French fur traders. Most Tionontati lived in longhouses in walled villages southwest of Nottawasaga Bay in the lee of the Niagara Escarpment, but archeological evidence of a Tionontati village has been found as far south as northern Mulmur Township, and their hunting range included Dufferin County. As allies and trading partners of the Wendat, the Tionontati were nearly wiped out during wars with the Haudenosaunee (1649–50) over control of the fur trade. Survivors joined other First Nation refugees displaced by the wars and eventually migrated to present-day Oklahoma, where they formed the Wyandotte Nation

Anishinaabe is the singular form of “**Anishinabek**,” an encompassing name for Indigenous nations that share similar languages and cultural traditions. Nations such as the Odawa, Bodaywadami (Potawatomi) and Ojibwe/Chippewa, including the Mississauga, are Anishinabek peoples. Their traditional territory extends from the Ottawa River Valley to the Great Lakes and into Saskatchewan. Active fur trading partners of both the French and British, Anishinabek nations often clashed with the Haudenosaunee. Treaty lands of both the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Saugeen Ojibway are located within Caledon, Erin and Dufferin

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Many **Anishinabek** nations have roots in Erin, Caledon and Dufferin County. After about 1650, when the Haudenosaunee drove the Wendat out of Ontario, the Odawa, Bodaywadami (Potawatomi) and Ojibwe/Chippewa, including the Mississaugas, began moving into present-day southern Ontario. By 1700, the Mississaugas and their allies had driven the Haudenosaunee back to their homelands in northern New York State.

Named Hurons by early French traders because of the way they wore their hair, the **Huron-Wendat** call themselves Wendat. Though most Wendat villages were located north, east and south of Headwaters, the land and waterways of Caledon, Erin and Dufferin made up the westerly reaches of the nation's vast hunting and trading territory. By 1650, however, European diseases and the brutal trade wars with the Haudenosaunee had nearly wiped out the Wendat. Along with refugees from other nations, including the Tionontati, some Wendat migrated to Oklahoma. Others migrated to Québec, where the community of Wendake became their home.

Also known as Iroquois, the **Haudenosaunee** of the Six Nations of the Grand River near Brantford consist of the Kanienkagen (Mohawk), Onondowahgah (Seneca), Guyohkohnyoh (Cayuga), Onundagaono (Onondaga), Onayotekaono (Oneida) and As Ska-Ruh-Reh (Tuscarora) nations. Their traditional territory was located south of Lake Ontario in northern New York State. During the peace negotiations that ended the American Revolution (1775–83), the British released these Haudenosaunee lands to the Americans without consulting Indigenous leaders. As a result, many Haudenosaunee migrated north to present-day southern Ontario.

The **Haudenosaunee** and the **Mississaugas** were rivals who had fought bitterly over territory in southern Ontario. But by 1847, the **Mississaugas of the Credit River** area were in dire straits. Ravaged by European diseases and facing continued encroachment by settlers, who had depleted the area's game, fish and wood, they could not sustain their traditional way of life. So the Haudenosaunee, recalling that their home on the Haldimand Tract had been purchased from the Mississaugas, offered them territory on the tract. This became the new home of the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the two nations formed a close relationship.

Closely related to the Mississaugas through shared language and cultural traditions, the **Ojibway/Chippewa** are Anishinabek peoples who ranged through the present-day Headwaters region after migrating in the late 1600s to the territory of the dispersed Wendat, Tionantati and Attawandaron. During the fur-trade era, the Ojibwe and Chippewa often acted as "middlemen" between Europeans seeking furs and more distant Indigenous nations eager to trade the furs they had harvested.

Métis people consider themselves to be a unique Indigenous nation. They trace their ancestry to marriages between Indigenous women and European men. These marriages often helped facilitate the expansion of the fur trade, and distinct Métis communities arose in which the two cultures mixed to create a unique history and identity. Efforts have been made to strengthen the Métis language, Michif, and encourage its use by Métis people.

The **Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation** originally migrated from the Mississagi River area on the north shore of Lake Huron. Many believe the name “Mississauga” originated in their association with the river. After about 1650, many Mississaugas began migrating south, gradually pushing the Haudenosaunee back to their homelands in northern New York State. Mississauga territory covered a large area radiating outward from the western end of Lake Ontario and included Caledon and Erin. The mouth of the Credit River – the name “Credit” reflects the European approach of using credit when trading with Indigenous people – was an important focus of the Mississaugas’ trading relationships and became part of the nation’s name.

Commitments to **strive to protect** the natural environment, as well as to honour and respect Indigenous heritage, suggest good intentions. And both the federal and Ontario governments have enshrined in law a “duty to consult” Indigenous peoples when government actions affect their inherent or treaty rights. Caledon and the Mississaugas, for example, have worked together to develop a protocol to seek and incorporate Indigenous perspectives into town policies and planning. But it remains to be seen whether protocols such as this will translate into the sincere and meaningful engagement necessary to open the way to true reconciliation

The **Ajetance Treaty** (1818), signed by Chief Ajetance of the Mississaugas of the Credit, released 648,000 acres of land for British settlement. Devastated by European diseases and forced off their land by settlers, the Mississaugas sold this land under duress. In return, the Mississaugas were promised annual payments of £522 in goods. The treaty territory included present-day Caledon, Erin, East Garafraxa and part of Orangeville, and like the Nottawasaga Purchase, land the British had earlier excluded from the Haldimand Tract.