



NYA WEÑHA SKÄ NOÑH ~ WELCOME TO  
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 PEOPLE OF THE HILLS

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### REPATRIATION IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO

#### Onondaga Nation Welcomes the Voluntary Actions of the Onondaga Historical Association - A Private Museum

Onondaganation.org

June 12, 2012 – Syracuse, NY-- Onondaga Nation leaders today accepted the return of a wampum belt from the collections of the Onondaga Historical Association (OHA), a private museum located in Syracuse, NY. It completed a series of repatriations to the Onondaga Nation this spring by the OHA, including the bones of ancestors for proper burial.

“We are very appreciative for the return of our sacred and cultural items,” stated Sidney Hill, the Tadodaho or spiritual leader, of the Onondaga Nation and Haudenosaunee Confederacy. “These are things that belong to our culture, are a living part of our culture, and to have them back is very healing.”



Cultural patrimony is defined under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) as objects ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance that cannot be owned or alienated by an individual because of their central importance to a Native American group. The regulations give the example of the Confederacy Wampum Belts of the Iroquois as cultural patrimony. It should be noted that only federally-funded museums are subject to NAGPRA, not private museums such as OHA. The repatriation by the OHA is entirely voluntary and sets an excellent example for other private museums.

“It was just the right thing to do,” explained Gregg Tripoli, Executive Director of the Onondaga Historical Association.

Wampum belts are very important to the Onondaga and the Haudenosaunee, as they are used to make treaties and record significant events. Many were illegally acquired by collectors in the past. This particular wampum belt came to the OHA in 1919 after being in possession of a family in Minoa, NY.

A replica of the belt was made by Onondaga Nation Faithkeeper Tony Gonyea, and presented to the museum in appreciation for the return of the wampum belt.



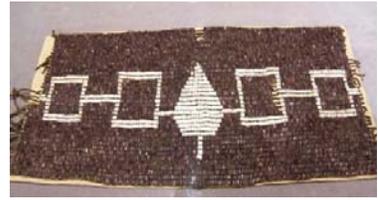
The Onondaga leaders also brought with them, for a rare public viewing, two belts central to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy: the Hiawatha Belt symbolizing the founding of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy over 1000 years ago on the shores of Onondaga Lake, and the Ever-Growing Tree Belt, also known as the Dust Fan Belt, which symbolizes the Tree of Peace.



Other sacred items, the ancestors and masks, were returned earlier in the spring of 2012 with private ceremonies.

“Hopefully, it will send a message to other people to do the right thing,” Hill said. “How much more sacred can it get than to want your ancestors’ bones to be at rest? We want the ones we put to rest to have a good journey; all of our teaching about the cycle of life is surrounded by that.”





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