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Construction begins on Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center

By [ELLEN ABBOTT](#) · AUG 10, 2015

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A display from the former Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois museum.

ELLEN ABBOTT WRVO NEWS FILE PHOTO

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Construction of a new cultural center at the old French fort along Onondaga Lake begins this week. The new Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center will take the place of the former Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois museum site. The new cultural center will tell the history of the Onondaga Nation, from their perspective.

The history of the Haudenosaunee, also known as the Iroquois Confederacy, has generally been told through a white Eurocentric lens, and as a written story. Organizers believe that might not be the best way to tell the story of the democracy that was created on the shores of Onondaga Lake.

"We cannot just rely on a written historical record. It is not entirely unbiased," said Greg Tripoli, executive director of the Onondaga Historical Association, which has taken over management of the Onondaga County-owned facility.

Tripoli says this museum will be a little different than most museums, telling the story of the Haudenosaunee the way they learned it -- by word of mouth.

"It pays tribute to an oral history as a valid documentary form. And it's from the perspective of the Haudenosaunee, principally the Onondaga, which are the spiritual and political center of that Confederacy," said Tripoli.

That means the centerpiece of each of the six exhibit halls will be a film, where the Haudenosaunee tell visitors their history and the values.

As for the French fort, which has been standing on its spot for 80 years, next to the Saint Marie among the Iroquois museum and was the first point of contact between the Haudenosaunee and Jesuit missionaries, it will remain. Tripoli says that's where visitors will confront a whitewashed history.

"That facility really forces us to directly confront the issues of contact, particularly as they were perceived by the Haudenosaunee community, so literally the existence of that facility forces that discussion, which is a difficult discussion to have. It was not a pleasant time for the Haudenosaunee," said Tripoli.

Onondaga Lake is considered sacred to the Haudenosaunee, because it's where five warring tribes made peace and buried their weapons beneath a white pine tree. The Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center is expected to open in late November.