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The Excluded Algonquin Narrative of the Ottawa Valley

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THE EXCLUDED ALGONQUIN NARRATIVE OF THE OTTAWA VALLEY

KEYWORDS

Algonquin. Ottawa Valley.

The Ottawa Valley boasts a long, rich history of Algonquin peoples in the area. Algonquins have inhabited the area for approximately 12 000 years.¹ There have been numerous archaeological finds and digs in the Ottawa Valley to provide solid evidence for this long occupation as well as oral history passed down through Algonquin peoples. Algonquins traditionally resided on the Kitchissippi (Ottawa) River and its tributary arms north to Lake Nipissing and south to Hawkesbury, Ontario.² Algonquins were traditionally nomadic hunters.³ The point of European/Algonquin contact occurred at Tadoussac in 1603, and the first point of contact in Ottawa Valley resulted a decade later in 1613 between Champlain and the Algonquins of Morrison's (Tessouat's) Island.⁴ At this point of contact, the Algonquins were a nomadic hunter/fisher/gatherer society who lived in large groups in the summer near large bodies of water (like Morrison's Island) and retreated into smaller groups to hunt big game during the winter.⁵ The Algonquins immediately aligned themselves with the French in the Fur Trade, which was a successful venture for them at first due to their ideal location on the Ottawa River.⁶ The Algonquins continued to contribute and enhance Ottawa Valley culture and history to current times. Even though Algonquins have and continue to contribute greatly to Ottawa Valley history they are often left out of the dominant Ottawa Valley narrative that produces a glorified recounting of settler and colonial history. Raymond Williams coined the term “selective tradition” where the state (or cities)

¹ Whiteduck, Kirby. *Algonquin Traditional Culture*. Edited by George W. Miller. Council of Algonquins of Pikwakanagan and Kirby J. Whiteduck. 2002. Page 8.

² Ibid. Page 1.

³ McGregor, Stephen. “*Since Time Immemorial: Our Story. The Story of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg.*” Maniwaki, Quebec, Kitigan Zibi Education Council. 2004 Page 18.

⁴ Ibid. Page 143.

⁵ Litalien, Raymonde, Kathe Roth and Denis Vaugeois. *Champlain: the Birth of French America*. McGill-Queen's Press. 2004. Page 153.

⁶ Rogers, Edward S and Donald B. Smith. *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations*. Dundurn Press. 1984. Page 67-68.

rationalize and produce a narrow, one-sided narrative of history.⁷ The Ottawa Valley is producing this selective tradition where Algonquins are being silenced and overshadowed. This silencing and overshadowing of Algonquin presence and contribution by settler and colonial history in the dominant Ottawa Valley narrative is evident in examining the exclusion or misrepresentation of Algonquin people in historical representations on landscapes and in the lack of preservation of significant Algonquin historical and cultural sights.

Lack of Algonquin Recognition in Historical Landmarks

Algonquins are silenced in the dominant Ottawa Valley narrative in the way they are excluded from historical landmarks like local plaques, murals, and monuments. In the Ottawa Valley, there is a distinct, significant emphasis on settler history in these depictions of local culture and history. The Algonquins do lend their name to many businesses, street names and even a college but these fail to educate people on the Algonquin peoples themselves. There is little acknowledgement of local indigenous history, and when there are Aboriginal representation in murals, statues or monuments they can be incorrect, misleading or come from a eurocentric perspective. One example of this is Logos Land in Cobden glorifying the finding of Champlain's astrolabe in the area. In the park, there is a replica of the astrolabe and a legend beside it explaining the story of Champlain and the finding of the astrolabe. While this is a great, historic find there is little reference to the many significant local Aboriginal archaeological finds in the area that are often older and just as historically valuable. Another great example of the Algonquin narrative being silenced in the Ottawa Valley is Pembroke, Ontario's lack of Algonquin presence in their historical landmarks. According to the murals, history of the area begins with Champlain's arrival in 1613. Illustrating the region's history as beginning with European settlement silences the 12 000 years⁸ of Algonquin history of the Ottawa Valley. The murals also exclusively illustrate Pembroke's involvement in the lumber history, its industrial achievements and other examples of European settler and pioneer history but leave out Aboriginal achievements in the area. An example of Aboriginal

⁷ Furniss, Elizabeth. *The Landscape of Public History: Regional Identities, Pioneer Traditions and the Frontier Myth in Political Discourse*. The Burden of History. Page 79.

⁸ Whiteduck, Kirby. *Algonquin Traditional Culture*. Edited by George W. Miller. Council of Algonquins of Pikwakanagan and Kirby J. Whiteduck. 2002. Page 8.

exclusion in Pembroke's murals is the "Marching Towards the Millenium" mural at 171 Alexander Street. The mural is "A celebration of the pioneer and entrepreneurial spirit of the people of Pembroke since 1828".⁹ This mural is thus attempting to encapsulate all of Pembroke's achievements and great people of the past with a hopeful, bright outlook of the future. All of the people in the mural appear to be of European descent, and there are no Aboriginal people depicted in a mural that is supposed to be an inclusive mural of all of Pembroke's great citizens and highlights in local history. Therefore, by leaving out Algonquin peoples in any of their murals, Pembroke silences the Algonquin narrative of the Ottawa Valley by portraying history as beginning with European arrival and continuing with peoples of European descent contributing to the highlights of Pembroke history. Many Bonnechere Algonquins reside in Pembroke and the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan live a mere thirty minute drive away. By excluding local Aboriginal peoples' accomplishments and contributions in the murals, Pembroke creates a narrow view of history.

Pembroke also silences the Algonquin narrative in local history by creating false or misleading Aboriginal representations. An example of this is the totem pole at Riverside Park in Pembroke. The totem pole was carved by Abe Patterson (a non-Aboriginal local man) who appropriated the north-west coast peoples symbol and placed local non-Aboriginal signs on the totem pole (like CFB Petawawa). The totem pole can give local citizens and non-locals travelling through the area a false representation of the local Aboriginal people since the totem pole is used by Aboriginal nations across the country in British Columbia and not by the local Algonquin population. Therefore, as illustrated, through their selective representations of historical depictions in plaques, murals, and monuments, the Ottawa Valley silences the Algonquin narrative while exclusively depicting a glorified settler society illustration of history.

Lack of Preservation of Significant Algonquin Sites

⁹ Giant Tiger. "Marching Into the Millenium" Accessed. March 2nd. 2011. <http://www.gianttiger.com/en/community/murals/>

Algonquins are silenced in the dominant Ottawa Valley narrative by the lack of preservation of significant Algonquin historical and cultural sites. Two significant examples of this are the extensive Algonquin archaeological site of Morrison's Island and the Algonquin pictographs at Oiseau Rock. Morrison's Island is a great example of a significant cultural, historical and spiritual site of the Algonquin peoples in the Ottawa Valley. Algonquin peoples have had a strong presence on this island for at least six thousand years up until the fur trade but unfortunately have no control of the island today. The official, western discovery and excavation of Morrison's Island's ancient Algonquin past occurred in the early 1960's and was conducted by Ottawa Valley expert Clyde C. Kennedy.¹⁰ Kennedy's discovery and excavation yielded thousands of artifacts and provided an extensive glimpse into the lives of ancient ancestors of today's Algonquin peoples, and illustrated how historically, culturally and spiritually significant the island is for Algonquins. For instance: at the grave sight dating to the Archaic period at Morrison's Island, archaeologists found a variety of grave offerings. The grave offerings included a turtle rattle possibly used in shamanistic ceremonies (that is like ones mentioned by European settlers in the 1600s that were used by Algonquins in shamanic rituals), a large bird bone whistle, pierced cervid toe bones (possibly used in a cup and pin game), and a decorated antler piece.¹¹ The turtle rattle alludes to perhaps a developed shamanic tradition in ancient Algonquin society while the multitude of personal items proves they had care for the afterlife of their dead. Morrison's Island was thus a very important spiritual site as they had buried their dead there. Morrison's Island is also an example of ancient Algonquin social networks as evidence discovered at Morrison's Island proves that these people had massive trade and communication networks established. Copper found on Morrison's Island dated six thousand years ago and originated from one thousand kilometres away in Lake Superior.¹² Onondaga chert from the same Archaic period that was discovered at Morrison's Island originated five hundred kilometres south of the Ottawa Valley¹³. Morrison's Island is also a very historically and culturally important site for its significance regarding European contact and the results of this on Algonquin peoples. Champlain first came into contact with the Morrison's Island Algonquins in 1613.¹⁴ This resulted in the Algonquins immediately aligning themselves with the French in the Fur Trade. Due to their

¹⁰ Clermont, Norman. *The Archaic Occupation of the Ottawa Valley*. Ottawa Valley Prehistory. Outaouais no. 6. Page 47.

¹¹ Whiteduck, Kirby. *Algonquin Traditional Culture*. Edited by George W. Miller. Council of Algonquins of Pikwakanagan and Kirby J. Whiteduck. 2002. Page 10.

¹² Clermont, Norman. *The Archaic Occupation of the Ottawa Valley*. Ottawa Valley Prehistory. Outaouais no. 6. Page 50.

¹³ Ibid. Page 50.

ideal location on Morrison's Island and the Ottawa River, they made large profits on the fur trade.¹⁵ During the fur trade, Algonquins established a toll booth system where people crossing the river by Morrison's Island had to pay to pass. Today, this can be interpreted as evidence of Algonquins asserting their nationhood.

Unfortunately, Algonquins lost their control over Morrison's Island. Although authoritative bodies in the region were aware of the historical and cultural significance of the island to Aboriginal peoples (especially after Clyde Kennedy's discovery), there were no steps taken to preserve the site as a heritage site. Today, Morrison's Island hosts a golf course and cottages. As illustrated, Morrison's Island was an extremely significant cultural, spiritual and historical site for Algonquin peoples. The Algonquin narrative was silenced by the dominant Ottawa Valley narrative when it was not saved from development.

Oiseau Rock is another example of the Algonquin narrative of the Ottawa Valley being silenced by lack of protection of significant cultural, historical and spiritual sites of the Algonquin peoples. Oiseau Rock is a one hundred fifty metre tall rock face jutting out of the Ottawa River. The Algonquins of Golden Lake and the Algonquins of Kitigan Zibi call it "Migizi Kiishkaabikaan" ("Bird Rock").¹⁶ The origins or the name are controversial. Some believe it comes from the story of an eagle stealing a baby off the rock while others believe it comes from the story of an Anishinabe women throwing herself off the rock (like a bird) after her warrior lover died. These may be non-Aboriginal romanticized stories. Historically, Native peoples have been visiting the rock for at least four hundred years.¹⁷ Chevalier de Troyes noticed Native peoples making offerings by throwing arrows with tobacco attached to them over the rock.¹⁸ The rock face is covered with many ancient Native pictographs done in red ochre. One is of Nanaboozhou (Weeskijock), which an Anishnabe man from Temagami confirmed in 1913.¹⁹ Nanaboozhou is a trickster and a very important, central and spiritual being in Algonquin/Anishinabe culture. Scholars believe that the Nanaboozhou depiction on Oiseau Rock was painted by a vision seeker who drew seven lines tallying the amount of days he

¹⁴ Whiteduck, Kirby. *Algonquin Traditional Culture*. Edited by George W. Miller. Council of Algonquins of Pikwakanagan and Kirby J. Whiteduck. 2002. Page 143.

¹⁵ Rogers, Edward S and Donald B. Smith. *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations*. Dundurn Press. 1984. Page 67-68.

¹⁶ Friends of Oiseau Rock. "Introduction". Accessed March 3rd, 2011. <http://www.friendsofoiseaurock.ca/>

¹⁷ Friends of Oiseau Rock. "History of Oiseau Rock". Accessed March 3rd, 2011. <http://www.friendsofoiseaurock.ca/history.htm>

¹⁸ Chippindale, Christopher and George Nash. "Pictures in Place: the figured landscapes of rock-art". Cambridge University Press. 2004. Page 299.

¹⁹ Friends of Oiseau Rock. "History of Oiseau Rock". Accessed March 3rd, 2011. <http://www.friendsofoiseaurock.ca/history.htm>

fasted for.²⁰ There are also canoes, a bear, a bird, fish, a serpent and possibly a “black robe” missionary.²¹ Dr. David Arseneault has found seventy-seven ochre paintings and calls the site a “non-renewable resource”.²²

Despite the rock being a rich “non-renewable” cultural, spiritual, and historical site, there have been few conservative steps taken by authoritative bodies. While the Quebec Government has protected the rock from logging, the rock's pictographs have been neglected. In fact, over the past 60 years, the pictographs have been covered with graffiti.²³ Some pictographs have been completely defaced by this graffiti.²⁴ In 1998, the Canadian Conservation Institute called the site one of the worst cases of pictograph graffiti they had encountered.²⁵ The Algonquins of Kitigan Zibi and Pikwakanagan have attempted to bring attention to the rock by holding ceremonies and gatherings on it.²⁶ The non-profit group “Friends of Oiseau Rock” have created hiking trails and signs sharing the history of the pictographs and urging the public not to deface them. This unfortunately has come too late for many graffiti covered pictographs. Signs, while a good first step, will not deter many graffiti defacers since many just boat up to the rock and will not utilize the hiking trails where they will see the signs. Once the pictographs are covered, the historical value of the rock is lost, and a piece of the Algonquin narrative is silenced. The defacing of the rock is also defacing a very sacred site to the Algonquins. While the signs and hiking trails are a good first step, authoritative bodies must step in before more damage is done. The site could act as a great educational tool for non-Aboriginal peoples in the area of the history, culture and spirituality of Algonquin peoples which would act to unveil this valuable piece of the Ottawa Valley narrative. Therefore, Oiseau Rock is another great example of the Algonquin narrative being silenced by lack of preservation of Algonquin heritage sites. Morrison's Island and Oiseau Rock are just two examples of how Algonquin peoples have a very longstanding, rich, stable history in the area. This valuable narrative is silenced by this lack of preservation of vital Algonquin sites.

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- ²⁰ Friends of Oiseau Rock. “*The Pictographs*”. Accessed March 3rd, 2011 <http://www.friendsofoiseaurock.ca/picto.htm>
- ²¹ Friends of Oiseau Rock. “*The Pictographs*”. Accessed March 3rd, 2011 <http://www.friendsofoiseaurock.ca/picto.htm>
- ²² Friends of Oiseau Rock. “*Conservation*”. Accessed March 3rd, 2011 <http://www.friendsofoiseaurock.ca/conservation.htm>
- ²³ Friends of Oiseau Rock. “*Conservation*”. Accessed March 3rd, 2011 <http://www.friendsofoiseaurock.ca/conservation.htm>
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- ²⁶ Friends of Oiseau Rock. “*History of Oiseau Rock*”. Accessed March 3rd, 2011. <http://www.friendsofoiseaurock.ca/history.htm>

Conclusion

Algonquin peoples have been excluded in the Ottawa Valley's historical representations on landscape and in the lack of preservation of significant Ottawa Valley Algonquin historical and cultural sights. This has resulted in Algonquins being silenced and overshadowed by settler and colonial history in the dominant Ottawa Valley narrative. In 2006 the population of Pikwakanagan was four hundred and six people.²⁷ There is also a large non-status population in the Ottawa Valley. Therefore this selective representation of Ottawa Valley history is damaging as it leaves out a vast, vital piece of history and excludes a major group from the narrative. This exclusionary narrative is especially troubling when today, there is a major Algonquin land claim being negotiated with the Government of Ontario. In 1991, the Government of Ontario agreed to negotiate a land claim with the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan.²⁸ In 1992, the Algonquins of Bonnechere, Greater Golden Lake, Shabot Obaadjiwan, Ottawa, Bancroft, Snimikobi, Antoine, and Whitney and area were invited to join the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan in negotiations with the Government of Ontario.²⁹ Today, negotiations continue and an agreement-in-principle may be signed on to soon. The land claim encompasses thirty six thousand square acres from North Bay to Ottawa.³⁰ The expected outcome of the claim includes parcels of land, a financial package, cultural and economic development opportunities for the Algonquins, as well as appropriate arrangements respecting harvesting rights including hunting and fishing.³¹ Since the Algonquin narrative has been silenced and overshadowed in the Ottawa Valley, average citizens of the Ottawa Valley are often unaware or ignorant to the longstanding, rich and contributory history Algonquins have had in the area and that Algonquins continue to inhabit and contribute to the area today. From this, negative, ignorant assumptions and understandings of the Algonquin peoples and the land claim may be created. Thus, the Ottawa Valley must work to provide a more holistic, full and true understanding and portrayal of local history by including Algonquin peoples instead of silencing and excluding them from the dominant narrative.

²⁷ Statistics Canada. 2006 *Aboriginal Population Profile: Pikwakanagan (Golden Lake 39)*. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-594/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3547037&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=Pik&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=35&B1=All&Custom=> Accessed March 25th, 2011.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. *Fact Sheet: The Algonquin Land Claim*. <http://www.aboriginalaffairs.gov.on.ca/english/negotiate/algonquin/factsheet.asp>. Accessed January 27th, 2011.

³¹ Ibid.

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