

# The Haudenosaunee/Six Nations and the Royal Proclamation of 1763

## THE COVENANT CHAIN RELATIONSHIP

The Haudenosaunee/Six Nations have a very different understanding of the Royal Proclamation of 1763. While the document stated the process by which the Crown would engage Native people in acquiring lands for settlement, it also asserted the sovereignty of the Crown over all people in North America. The Haudenosaunee would have considered this unilateral proclamation not applicable to them. It was contrary to the long-standing Covenant Chain relationship they had already agreed to with the Crown.

In order to fully grasp this assertion, one needs to understand the progression of wampum belt agreements over time—those agreements that preceded the Proclamation and those that followed. The Two Row wampum belt was formalized between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch in 1613, as a foundation for the relationship between two sovereign nations, represented by their individual governments. In 1667, the British, having supplanted the Dutch in North America, sought to secure an alliance with the Haudenosaunee for trade purposes. They entered into the Covenant Chain, a relationship of “respect, trust and friendship.” As part of this relationship, the Haudenosaunee stipulated, “We will not be as Father and Son, but like Brothers.” Simultaneously, the French had established trading relationships with nations to the northeast.

## BEAVER HUNTING GROUNDS

In 1701, the British entered into the Nanfan Treaty with the nations of the Great Lakes. This treaty established the “Beaver Hunting Grounds,” a territory that was acknowledged as shared among the nations that participated in the treaty. This included the Haudenosaunee. The Beaver Hunting Grounds was a terri-

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tory that spanned most of the Great Lakes and into the Ohio River Valley. By covering such an expanse of land, one could suggest that the Nanfan Treaty was an effort by the British to counter French ambitions of their domination over the fur trade and to assert British authority. Between 1667 and 1763, the Covenant Chain between the Haudenosaunee and the British was restored on several occasions. On each occasion, the Covenant was renewed following prescribed protocols.

There is a progression of ideas and concepts that flows from this series of significant events that speak to a Haudenosaunee perception of the Royal Proclamation of 1763. Their approach to this document is perhaps best evidenced by the Haudenosaunee’s noticeable absence (except for seven Seneca war chiefs) at the Treaty of Niagara in 1764. By 1764, the Seven Years War had ended with the defeat of the French. The successive renewals of the Covenant Chain and the British victory in the Seven Years War restored the Nanfan Treaty’s Beaver Hunting Grounds. The Royal Proclamation was issued by the Crown to address the French and to state the terms that would be taken to treaty with First Nations going forward. The Haudenosaunee respected the Two Row wampum belt by not interfering with how the British dealt with the French and

other native nations. Instead, the Haudenosaunee relied on the relationship established by the Covenant Chain.

## PLEDGE OF THE CROWN BELT

This protocol was also respected during the American Revolution. Following the defeat of the British, the British compensated the Haudenosaunee as their allies with the Haldimand Deed lands. These lands were acquired from the Mississauga under the prescribed terms of the Royal Proclamation and awarded to the Haudenosaunee. As far as the Haudenosaunee are concerned, this act suggests that the Covenant Chain relationship was still intact as separate from the Royal Proclamation decades after the Proclamation was issued. In the War of 1812, the British and the Haudenosaunee once again invoked the Covenant Chain. Following the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, the Crown met with the Haudenosaunee and in the spring of 1815, presented them with the “Pledge of the Crown Belt,” which reiterated that all their possessions, rights, and privileges (land, etc.) would be restored to them as they had been before 1812.

The Crown in Canada has enshrined the Royal Proclamation of 1763 as a foundational constitutional document. In privileging this document, the Crown and the Canadian government effectively ignore those agreements and relationships that preceded and followed it. Today, the Haudenosaunee of the Grand River look to the Covenant Chain relationship and the Nanfan Treaty as informing negotiations with the Crown while making virtually no reference to the Royal Proclamation of 1763. 🍁

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