



The Two Row Wampum

When the Haudenosaunee first came into contact with the European nations, treaties of peace and friendship were made. Each was symbolized by the Gus-Wen-Tah or Two Row Wampum. There is a bed of white wampum which symbolizes the purity of the agreement. There are two rows of purple, and those two rows have the spirit of your ancestors and mine. There are three beads of wampum separating the two rows and they symbolize peace, friendship and respect.

These two rows will symbolize two paths or two vessels, travelling down the same river together. One, a birch bark canoe, will be for the Indian people, their laws, their customs and their ways. The other, a ship, will be for the white people and their laws, their customs and their ways. We shall each travel the river together, side by side, but in our own boat. Neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel.

The principles of the Two Row Wampum became the basis for all treaties and agreements that were made with the Europeans and later the Americans. Now that Canada is a fully independent nation, perhaps it will be possible to strike up the Two Row Wampum between us, so that we may go our ways, side by side, in friendship and peace.

— excerpted from presentations to the Special Committee by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and from Wampum Belts by Tehanetorens

The cover painting is a two-row wampum belt on a landscape. But it is more than the representation of an object. Like the Haudenosaunee artist who made the belt, I am part of a process of carrying an idea through history — the idea symbolized by the two-row wampum. The belt shouldn't be forgotten in a museum, because it expresses an idea, and an idea can't be killed. This report is part of the same process of carrying the idea forward, and the painting expresses my hope that the report won't be set aside and forgotten either.