

CRAIGLEITH AND THE BIRTH OF THE WYANDOT TRIBE

Charles Garrad and John Steckley

Abstract

The circumstances, place and date of the birth of the historic Wyandot Tribe are examined.

Résumé

Les circonstances, le lieu et la date de naissance de la tribu historique Wyandot sont examinés.

Maps following

Fig. 1 - the Birth of the Wyandot Tribe.

page 7

Fig. 2 - the Migration of the Wyandot Tribe from Craigleith, and the Location of three modern Descendant Groups.

Page 8

Introduction

Wyandot people and tribes have existed in North America since an unknown time in varying combinations of clans and phratries. However, it may be said that the Wyandot Tribe, as a distinct historical, political, military and social entity in the history of the Detroit Valley, Ohio, Kansas and Oklahoma through the last three centuries, began when its three component phratries, Deer, Wolf and Turtle, first came together. This recorded historic event occurred in 1649 at Craigleith, Ontario.

The Wyandot people and the Wyandot Tribe

In 1639, Father Jerome Lalemant asked the Huron what they called themselves. The answer was "Wendat" (JR16:227). Had the Petun, Neutral, Wenro, or Eries been asked the same question, they might have given the same answer.

The word 'Wendat' (8endat, Ouendat, Wendat, Hoüandate, Wyandotte, Wyandot and other renderings) has proved difficult to translate, possibly because of its antiquity. It may contain the noun -hwend-, meaning island. There are a number of references in the ethnohistorical literature to the country of the Huron being an island (see JR15:21). In 1648, a Huron speaker, summing up the perilous position of his people at that time, stated, "This country is an Island; it has now become a floating one, to be overwhelmed by the first outburst of the storm" (JR33:237-9). Dictionaries written in the Huron and Mohawk languages later in the seventeenth century refer to the Huron as 'Hatih8enda,rak', meaning 'they of the floating island' (FHc1697:97, Bruyas 1970:22). It has been speculated that the 'island' was not Huronia, but the mythical island formed on the back of a turtle to

receive ,Aatea,entsik, the original woman who fell from above, and where all her descendants, and those of the animals which played a part in the creation of the Island, dwell. Modern Six Nations art illustrating the Confederacy symbol, the Great Tree of Peace, often represents it as growing out of the back of a turtle, combining more recent and very ancient symbolism. The expression 'Turtle Island' is often used by First Nations people to refer to North America because of their traditional belief in their versions of this story.

At the time of the seventeenth century Dispersal, various Huron, Petun, Neutral and Erie tribes dispersed in several directions, particularly south to New York and east to Quebec, some to join other tribes, all to reform new political combinations. One of these new combinations was formed when a Turtle element was added to an existing Deer and Wolf group, which then went in a third direction, west, because of an alliance with the upper Great Lakes Odawa. It was this new Deer-Wolf-Turtle combination which emerged into later history as the Wyandot, a name derived from 'Wendat'.

The Origins of the Deer and Wolf

Before the arrival of the French, groups of Wyandot people had migrated north to the southern shore of Georgian Bay and there formed new combinations and alliances. Those east of the Nottawasaga River were named by the French as Huron. and those west of the River as petun (Tobacco Nation). In 1648, a Jesuit recorded that the Petun were composed to two "Nations", the Deer and the Wolves (JR33:143). As presented, the Deer and the Wolves seem to have been, at the same time, "Nations", phratries and clans. The earlier origins of these two groups are not yet known, but at the time, the Petun Deer Nation (not to be confused with the Huron Deer clan) were at the north end of the Petun country, with its principal village EKARENNIONDI and a secondary village near the shore at Craigeith. The Petun Wolf were further inland and south, with its principal village ETHARITA near Duntroon. The Petun were known to the Huron as "People of the Hills" "Khionontateronons"(JR20:43), "Tionnontatehronnons"(JR41:77), "Tionnontatez" (Charlevoix 1960:26-27) and other variants.

The Origins of the Turtle

Who the Turtle people were, or where they came from, and when, where and why the Turtle joined the Petun Deer and Wolf to become the Wyandot, has not previously been explained.

The key to identifying the Turtles lies in that the word more frequently used by the later Oklahoma Wyandot descendants for the Big Turtle clan actually meant the "moss-back turtle" (Barbeau 1915:86). The "moss-back turtle" people are known in the historical literature as the Wenro, of whom some historical facts are known (Steckley 1985).

Modern historic and linguistic studies, combined with recent archaeology and reasonable speculation, now provide a cohesive and plausible understanding of the sequence of events leading to the Wenro Turtles joining the Petun Deer and Wolf, the climax of which may be regarded as resulting in the birth of the historic Wyandot Tribe.

The Wenro

The name "Wenro" (8enrôhronons, Wenrôhronons, other variants) was long thought to mean "people of the place of the floating scum" (JR17:24,25; Hewitt cited in White 1978:409; White 1978:409-411).

When first mentioned in history the Wenro were in western New York State, allied to the Neutral, but in 1638, the Wenro abandoned their homeland and began the long trek to join the Huron of Ontario. More than six hundred Wenro refugees were accommodated in the Huron village of Ossossane and nearby dependent villages (JR17:25-31). Why they went to Ossossane, and what happened to them subsequently are questions to which answers are now available as the result of recent research.

Recent Research

Modern research into the Wenro in Huronia was inaugurated by archaeologist Frank Ridley when he observed that the geographic distribution of a New York pottery type "Genoa-Frilled" corresponded to the described distribution of the Wenro refugees. At the principal village of Ossossane, "Wenro pottery", as Ridley termed it, comprised 22% of the total pottery types. At another village, three miles distant, it was as high as 90% (Ridley 1961:43, cited in Ridley 1973; Ridley 1973:10-19). Later research extended the distributional range and somewhat amended the figures, but confirmed the basic interpretation. Genoa Frilled pottery in Ontario is accepted as Wenro.

Across Nottawasaga Bay from Huronia, Genoa Frilled has been found on two - and only two - late Petun sites. These are near the shore at Craigeith, and would be the first two villages reached by people crossing the Bay from Ossossane.

A linguistic breakthrough has aided researchers in learning more about the social mechanisms involved when the Wenro joined the Huron. In a French-Huron dictionary written during the mid-seventeenth century (Chaumonot c.1656), in an entry concerning the clans of the Huron, there is a key statement written in Huron. The Huron at that time had eight clans: the Bear, Deer, Turtle, Beaver, Wolf, Hawk, Loon-Sturgeon and Fox. It has been speculated that these clans were grouped into three phratries: Bear/Deer; Turtle/Beaver; Wolf/Hawk/Loon-Sturgeon/Fox. This is similar to the three-fold grouping of the Mohawk and Oneida, as well as the post-Dispersal Wyandot. In the dictionary entry, following the heading for the Turtle clan, there is a statement that has been translated as 'when it (i.e. the turtle clan) was small, it has as maternal grandchildren, those who are covered with moss'. The one referred to as 'those who are covered with moss' are the Wenro. In the early twentieth century writings of Canadian anthropologist Marius Barbeau, this name is given as belonging to the Big Turtle Clan, leading clan of the Turtle phratry. The Wenro joined the Turtle clan in the community of Ossossane, because they were already socially-defined as turtles. The Turtle presence in Ossossane would have then been a strong one.

How the Wenro Turtles, who had moved from the Neutral to the Huron, then joined with the Petun Wolf and Deer to form the three-phratry Wyandot Tribe is nowhere specifically recorded, but can be reasonably deduced, supported by the archaeological evidence of the pottery and by the later historical record.

At the time of contact, the Huron formed a loose alliance of five tribes: the Hattinnia8enten, 'They are

of the Bear country' or Bear; the Hatingennonniahak, 'they used to make cord (for fishing)' or Cord; the Atahonta,enrat, 'It has two white ears', or Deer; the Arenda,enronnon, "People at the rock', or Rock; and the Ataronronnon, 'People in the clay or bog', or Bog. The Bear were linguistically, and therefore ethnically, divided into northern and southern groups, hereafter termed Northern and Southern Bear. Ossossane was the largest territory in the Southern Bear territory. It is known that the Southern Bear and the Petun Deer, who could see each other's territory across Nottawasaga Bay, were close allies. They shared a similarity of dialects, suggesting their relationship continued from ancient times (Steckley 1993).

Ossossane Evacuated and Etharita Attacked (Figure 1)

On the night of March 19, 1649, the Turtle-dominated people of Ossossane learned that the Iroquois enemy could be approaching. They abandoned Ossossane (and district ?), and fled to the Petun, supposedly across the ice of frozen Georgian Bay. When they arrived at the two Petun Deer villages at Craigleith the people of Ossossane were received as refugees, allies and kin, although to house and feed them without notice at the end of winter, and to provide hospitality on the necessary scale, must have strained Petun resources substantially. It is a tribute to the organization and hospitality of the Petun Deer that they were both able and willing to do so.

The two villages where the refugees obtained refuge with the Petun are known, being both logical, and confirmed by archaeology. On a high ridge inland from the Nottawasaga Bay (of Georgian Bay) shore at Craigleith, the two villages controlled access inland from the beach and would necessarily be the first two villages reached by the refugees crossing from Ossossane. The larger was EKARENNIONDI, in its last location, then the principal town of the Petun confederacy, and of the Deer nation, phratry, and clan. The smaller village served as a detached suburb. That the Turtles who took refuge in the two Petun villages at Craigleith included Wenro is certain. "Genoa Filled" pottery has been found on both sites, but on no other in the Petun country (Garrad 1980).

Father Joseph Marie Chaumonot, the Jesuit Father resident at Ossossane, accompanied the refugees, who he described as "almost entirely Christian", and stayed with them in the Petun country until May 1, 1649, when he and "many of his dispersed flock" left the Petun and moved to Christian Island, where other Huron had already taken refuge (Jones 1909:379,382-3; Martin 1885:93,94).

If the population of Ossossane "was almost entirely Christian", there were some who were not. If "many" of the Christians departed with Chaumonot, there were some who did not. From this it is evident, even though not specifically stated, that a contingent of people from Ossossane and district remained with the Petun after Chaumonot's Christian party left on May 1, 1649. The Turtles had arrived.

On December 7, 1649, ETHARITA, the principal village of the Petun Wolves, further south, was attacked and destroyed by the Iroquois. The survivors consolidated for the winter in the two overburdened northern villages near the Craigleith beach. In the spring of 1650, the Petun abandoned their country for ever. Following their Odawa allies westward, the Petun Deer and Wolves were accompanied by their new Turtle compatriots. This threesome, still called Huron by the French, would remain together through a long migration and a difficult future, and become known in future history under the collective name of Wyandot (Wendat).

The two villages on the ridge south of the present shore at Craigeleith, which played an essential role in the birth of the Wyandot Tribe, are today well-known archaeological sites, recorded with the Ontario Ministry of Culture, Citizenship and Recreation, and the federal Archaeological Survey of Canada, under the names Plater-Martin BdHb-1 and Plater-Fleming BdHb-2. Because of them, and other later historic associations, the ridge itself has become known as "Craigeleith Heritage Ridge".

Dispersal and Migration (Figure 2)

The route followed by the amalgamated Petun Deer and Wolf, and Huron-Wenro Turtle, in their subsequent migration, and their later history as the Wyandot Tribe, is well known. At St. Ignace, Michigan, ca. 1677, a Christmas was recorded in which "All the Hurons, Christians and non-Christians, divided themselves into three companies, according to the different nations that constitute their village" (JR61:115). This suggests the Turtles had been elevated into a phratry with status comparable to the Deer and Wolf. The Wyandot underwent several later similar internal reorganisations.

At Detroit, as late as 1721, the principal Petun Deer and Wolf element among the Wyandot was recognized when they were described as "the Tionnontatez, a tribe of the Hurons" (Charlevoix in Lajeunesse 1960:26-27). In 1747, a detailed census of the Wyandots by Father Pierre Potier confirmed there were three phratries, the Deer, Turtle and Wolf (Potier in Lajeunesse 1960:37).

While the phratries were presented in the same order as they had almost one hundred years before, the number of clans had changed. The Deer phratry had gained one clan, the Turtle phratry had gained two clans, while the Wolf phratry had lost one. It would seem that the Ossossane Turtles had given that phratry strength. It appears that that strength would grow further with time.

Working with the Oklahoma Wyandot in 1911-2, Marius Barbeau found disagreement concerning whether the Deer or Big Turtle was anciently the most senior "... the Big Turtle people unanimously claim the Big Turtle clan to be the most ancient and first in rank, while the members of the Deer phratry claim their own clan and phratry to be the foremost". Barbeau concluded these opinions went back to the time when both clans, as Nations, were still independent and supreme (Barbeau 1915:85), and in this opinion is undoubtedly correct. The passing years and centuries had erased the memory of when the Deer gave the Turtle refugees sanctuary on Craigeleith Heritage Ridge.

REFERENCES

- Barbeau, C. Marius
1915 Huron and Wyandot Mythology
Canada Geological Survey Memoir 80, Ottawa
- Bruyas, Jacques
1970 Radices verborum iroquaeorum
AMS Press, New York
- Chaumonot, Pierre Joseph-Marie

FH = French-Huron Dictionary
c1697 ms.

Garrad, Charles
1980 Petun Pottery
Proceedings of the 1979 Iroquois Pottery Conference
Rochester Museum and Science Center, Rochester

JR = Jesuit Relations
1896-1901 The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents
ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, 73 vols., Cleveland

Jones , Arthur Edward
1909 8endake Ehen (or Old Huronia).
Fifth Report of the Ontario Bureau of Archives, Toronto.

Lajeunesse, Ernest J.
1960 The Windsor Border Region
The Champlain Society, Toronto

Martin, Father Félix
1885 Autobiographie du Père Chaumonot de la Compagnie de Jésus
H. Oudin, Paris

Ridley, Frank
1973 The Wenro in Huronia
Anthropological Journal of Canada, II(1)10-19, Ottawa

Steckley, John Lawson
1985 Why Did the Wenro Turn Turtle ?
Arch Notes 85-3:17-19
The Ontario Archaeological Society, Toronto
1993 Linguistically Linking the Petun with the Southern Bear
Arch Notes 93-2:20-26
The Ontario Archaeological Society, Toronto

White, Marian E.
1978 Neutral and Wenro
Handbook of North American Indians (15:407-411)
Smithsonian Institution, Washington

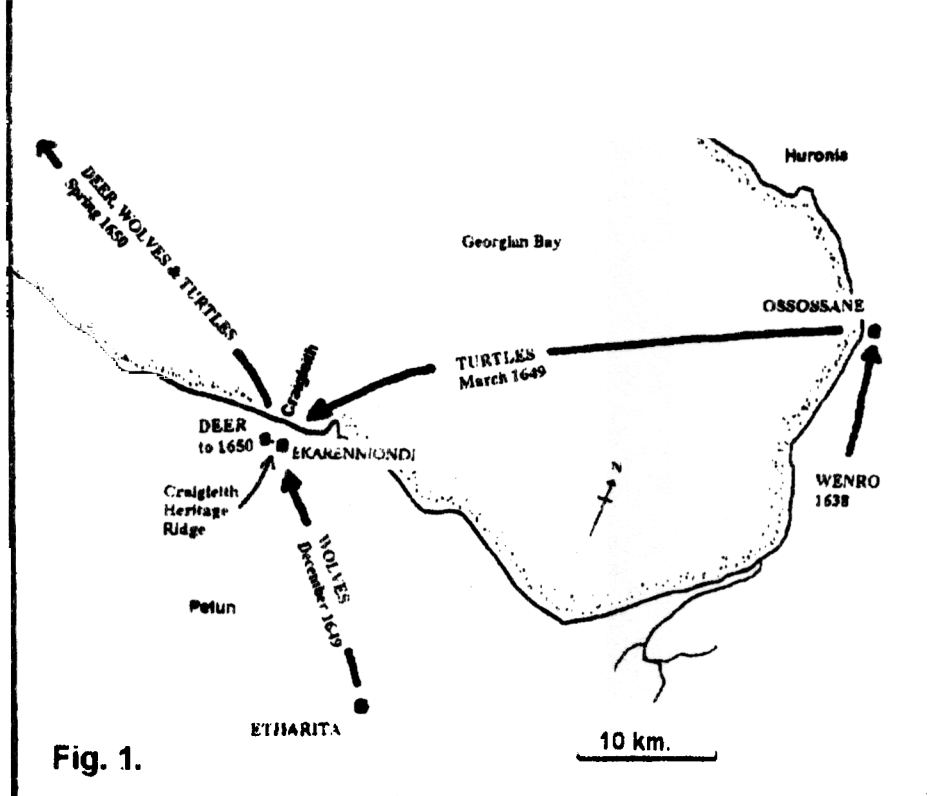


Fig. 1.

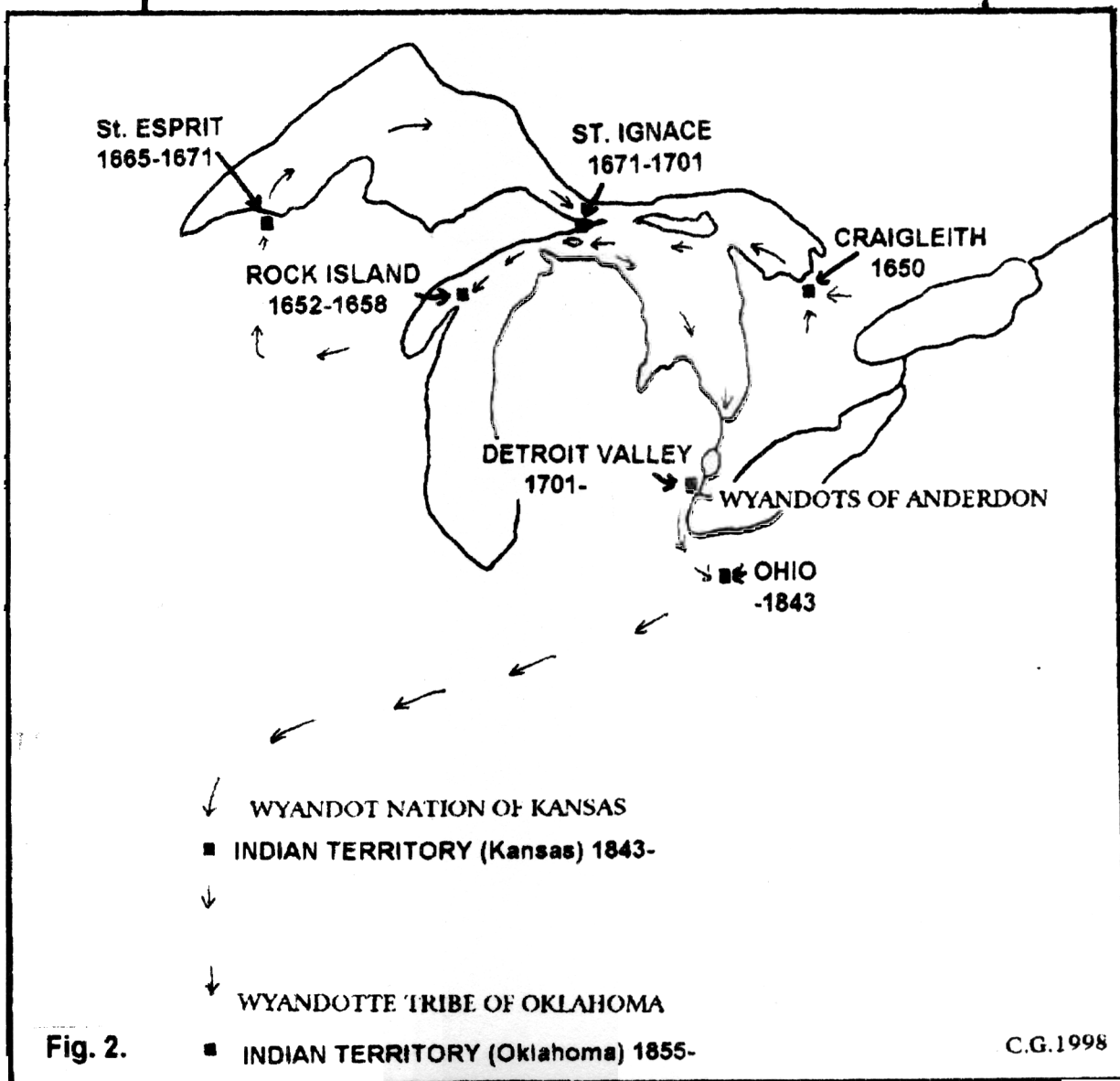


Fig. 2.